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CONTENTS

Narcissus Leaves the Pool
Aristides 487

Latin Fanatic: A Profile of Father Reginald Foster
Alexander Stille 497

Pariah Science: Whatever Happened to Cold Fusion?
David Goodstein 527

A Loss for Words: Plagiarism and Silence
Neal Bowers 545

Billy Blake's Trial
Brian Doyle 557

The Press and the Prose
Jacques Barzun 569

George Eliot for Grown-Ups
Gertrude Himmelfarb 577

Remembering Clement Greenberg
Morris Freedman 583

American Dryad: Agnes de Mille
Daniel Mark Epstein 591

POETRY

I. T. Davis
Trent Busch 542

Slap Shot
Matthew J. Spireng 544

Lily of the Valley
Christine Whittemore 556

Epitaph
Bruce Guernsey 582

At Large
Frederick Morgan 590

Closest to Home
Norbert Krapf 601

BOOKS

The Wasp Leaves the Bottle: Charles Sanders Peirce
Josiah Lee Auspitz 602

Reviews
J. C. Furnas, Ann M. Begley, Paul Delany 619

THE READER REPLIES 631

INDEX 637

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Narcissus Leaves the Pool

ARISTIDES

Emerging from the shower, I stand naked in front of my bathroom mirror. This, let the truth be told, is not an altogether enrapturing sight. (Had he grown well into middle age, Narcissus himself would surely have spent a lot less time gazing into the pool.) Contemplating myself, I feel a brief wave of pity for my wife who, night after night, has to sleep next to this body; I, more fortunate soul, have only to sleep *in* it. The bathroom has good light and a mirror extending nearly its full length; there is a soft rug, muted wallpaper, and ample blocks and slabs of cool, cream-colored marble. To paraphrase Bishop Heber on Ceylon, this bathroom is a place where every prospect pleases and only I am vile.

I note that my body seems slightly out of proportion to my head, which is a size 7 3/8. My shoulders are not wide—they are, more precisely, sloped—and my posture, a good deal less than perfect, has caused a slight humpiness where my neck runs into my back. Only the muscles in my calves and forearms could pass for youthful. My stomach is flat just now, but any weight I gain usually goes, like the blows of the late, punishing welterweight Carmen Basilio, straight to the midsection. The skin at my throat has begun to sag. I have old-guy elbows whose skin is dry, wrinkled, and reddish. If I lift my arms out to the side, the skin here, too, is loose, anticipating old age. My buttocks, I do believe, have begun to droop—not an inspiriting sight, drooping buttocks. The hair has long since disappeared from my shins, transferred perhaps to the backs of my shoulders, where I have only recently begun to notice it. My ankles, owing to what must be hundreds of broken capillaries, are purplish and descend into small, rather duckishly wide feet.

In the mirror before me, then, is an assemblage of hair, veins, and flesh that bears little more than what might be called a species resemblance to either Michelangelo's or Donatello's David. About Praxiteles' Hermes, I wish not even to speak. And this, you understand, is the result of fairly clean living. What if I had lived with the throttle full-out, drinking heavily, smoking steadily, keeping late hours, eating with the happy gluttony of which I am capable? I have to conclude that, as protection against the ravages of age, a quiet life, a careful diet, plenty of fresh air, and regular flossing may not be all they are cracked up to be.

My favorite physical feature is my hands, and over the years I have spent a fair amount of time staring at them. My fingers are longish and shapely; the backs of my hands and my knuckles are still covered by dark hair; turquoise veins stand out in high relief; the knuckles at mid-finger are large; the nails are strong and cut straight across—the whole presenting (to me at least) a pleasing complication. A woman once told me that I had sexy wrists, an odd compliment that, unfortunately, came too late to be useful. Had I known earlier, when I was a bachelor and still engaged in the sex wars, I might have gone with this strength and taken to wearing gaudy watches, gold identification bracelets, and extravagant cuff links.

My most notable physical attribute is my ears, which are large and stand well out from my head. Caricaturists quickly pick this up. They haven't yet picked up on the hair that is beginning to grow ever so lightly on the rims of these ears. The hair on my head is now more gray than brown, and I note that my eyebrows have begun to turn white. Below my eyes rest substantial bags, two-suiters distinctly

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not by Louis Vuitton. My skin color is high, somewhat tan in all seasons, and this, combined with the darkness of my whiskers and the manifold wrinkles and creases of my skin, works well to camouflage my face's various blemishes and mottlings. When I go out in the evening, I frequently have to shave a second time because my five o'clock shadow, owing to my being an early riser, sets in around three in the afternoon.

Henry James, in an essay with the very Jamesian title "The Question of the Possibilities," refers to the American businessman of his day as "seamed all over with the scars of the marketplace." I think often about how lucky I am to have been spared all such scars, both metaphorical and real, of the marketplace and of the medical office. I suppose the chief scar of our day is that left by heart surgery, from simple to quintuple bypass. Lifesaving though this operation has proved to be, I am pleased to have avoided it and want ardently to depart the planet without its particular rococo medical tattoo. Hence my blasted careful diet.

How little, really, has been exacted from this body over nearly six decades traipsing the earth! Apart from some rudimentary athletic training as a boy, and a few long marches and moderately strenuous calisthenics in the army, my body has never been truly tested. As for how easy my physical life has been, let me count the ways: I have never been tortured; I have never been shot or stabbed; I have never, after the age of ten, been in a serious fight; I have never fallen from a horse; I have never been hungry or thirsty for more than a few hours; I have never (aside from a tonsillectomy in childhood) even been operated on. Perhaps only an American in the twentieth century can make such a happy claim, but in the physical realm I have known almost nothing of pain, deprivation, or humiliation.

In the sixteenth century, certainly, no one would have been so privileged. The great Montaigne is full of talk of the body: of impotence, flatulence, smells, rheums, fluxions of gout, coronary palpitations, migraines, and gallstones (which "monstrously unlecher me"). He informs readers of the foods he likes ("I am not over-fond of salads nor of any fruit except melons"), of the rhythm of his defecations, of the kind of bed he prefers to sleep in (hard, with rather too many covers, and he likes to sleep alone). He tells of the time he was thrown from his horse, when he lost consciousness and had his first premonition of death.

Death, the closing down of the body, and old age, the beginning of that process, are perpetually on Montaigne's mind: "God shows mercy to those from whom he takes away life a little at a time: this is the sole advantage of growing old; the last death which you die will be all the less total and painful: it will only be killing off half a man, or a quarter." Montaigne thought long about defeating the fear of death, which he seems to have achieved. His own taste ran to a death among strangers, so that he wouldn't have to expend his last breaths consoling others about his dying. Owing to his gallstones, a condition that also killed his father, Montaigne, from his forty-fifth year on, lived with great, sometimes unbearable, pain. This pain, which never let him for long forget his body, helped make him a thinker more thoroughly grounded in reality, even though he seemed to deny it. "What does it matter," he asks, "if our arms flay about as long as our thoughts do not?"

While I feel fortunate to have lived in a century in which pain has in many quarters been muted if not defeated, I feel, at the same time, ever so mildly deprived that my body has not been placed in danger. Like every male, I wonder how I would have acted in battle with bullets whizzing by, bombs dropping around me, in hand-to-hand combat. Would I have kept my courage and won through? Every boy bred on World War II movies has wondered how much torture he could have stood without giving up military secrets that would have betrayed his comrades and his country. As a man now much too old for military service, I still wonder, when reading about the Nazi death camps or the Soviet slave-labor camps, how much, under pressure that was at bottom physical, I could have taken in the way of such punishment.

A boy lives in his body with an intensity and completeness that perhaps only professional athletes know as adults. His physical qualities count for nearly everything. Imperfections—plumpness, a big nose, poor skin, unruly hair—can bring him endless cruel teasing. How fast he can run, how far throw, how high jump, how artfully dodge, how willing to accept dares—these are the only questions that seem to matter in boyhood—or at least they did in mine. I grew up with many otherwise quite witless boys who

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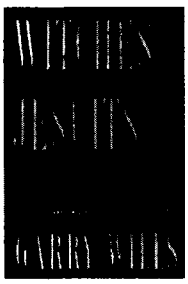

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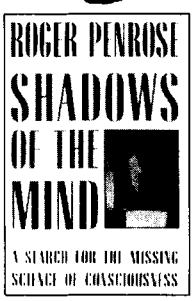

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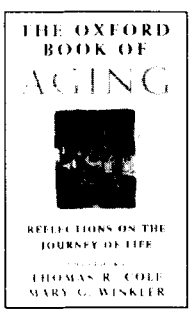

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were held in the highest regard because they could unfailingly field a grounder, throw a football fifty yards, or smash a tennis ball with a nicely controlled fury.

As a boy, I accepted without scruple the sovereignty of the physical—which meant the supremacy of athletic ability—as a guide to human quality. I was a respectable athlete myself, at any rate through grade school. Because I was small, my hope was to be a stylish athlete, an athlete with finesse, one who could make the quick, the smooth, the elegant move: to be the punch hitter, the agile dribbler with the deadly long shot, the smooth stroker. My talent was for pastiche; like many another boy, I was able to put together a fairly convincing hodgepodge imitation of the older boys and the professional athletes I had seen.

All this I brought off fairly well, at least for a while, but I lacked proper aggression. By proper aggression I really mean physical courage. Physical courage is probably an unteachable quality, and while I greatly admired it, I didn't have it in great abundance. In a clutch situation, I don't recall ever chickening out, but I was not ready on a regular basis to sacrifice my body, except when not to do so meant clear public disgrace.

A boy I grew up with who was always ready to sacrifice his body was Marty Summerfield. Not much bigger than I, Marty would run into a wall to catch a ball; stand unflinching at home plate to tag out a base runner thirty or forty pounds heavier than he who was about to steamroll him; catapult his body, kamikaze-like, into a defensive line to score a touchdown from two yards out. Marty lived on different terms with his body than did I or most of the other kids with whom we played. I considered the proposition of pain and quickly concluded that, on balance and where possible, it was best avoided; Marty never, as we should say nowadays, "factored in" pain. He just blazed ahead. Most of us were not cowards, but Marty was absolutely fearless. He had had a number of concussions and other interesting injuries. He had a generously chipped front tooth that I envied. That chipped tooth seemed the boyhood equivalent of a dueling scar, a bit of shrapnel in the hip, a Purple Heart.

The one gift bestowed upon my boyish body was excellent coordination. I don't recall ever feeling awkward. My body could do almost anything I wanted it to do: turn, twist, leap, calculate perfectly the arrival of a football in my hands, a baseball in my glove, and a tennis ball on my racket. What I couldn't do with my body was get it to grow taller.

The comic books that I read passionately as a kid regularly ran two ads on their back covers that were aimed at boys like me. These ads held out the promise of building up our bodies. In one, a man whose muscles were oiled and tensed offered to make us Commando Tough!, exclamation mark and all. In an even more popular ad, the famous bodybuilder Charles Atlas promised to convey the secrets of a muscle-building program he called "Dynamic Tension." Atlas's ad asked if one was tired of being a ninety-eight-pound weakling and showed cartoon drawings of such a weakling on the beach getting sand kicked in his face and losing his girlfriend to a bully.

At age nine, I was a good deal less than ninety-eight pounds when I sent away for the free sepia-colored pamphlet that Atlas pledged would change my life. Among the photographs it contained was one of a man stopping a railroad train in its progress with his bare arms: just the lightest touch of photo-hyperbole, perhaps. The deal was that I should send away, at no insubstantial cost, for a continuing series of pamphlets that would teach me how to build up my various muscle groups. To acquire the entire set, a couple of hundred bucks was required—no small sum for a boy of nine. When I asked my father for financial help, he replied, while turning the pages of the *Chicago Daily News* and not bothering to look up, "Whaddaya, kiddin' me?"

I had never been more serious. Yet "Dynamic Tension" would not have done the job, for it entailed a regular round of exercises, and it was the boring regularity of exercise of which I was incapable. Besides, I really didn't want to have the bulky, thickly veined muscles of the weight lifter. I wanted instead to have the smooth, long muscles of the graceful athlete. (Weight lifting was then thought to destroy athletic coordination. Today every collegiate athletic program has its weight room, and weight training is suggested even for baseball and tennis players.)

In the realm of the physical, the first rule is to feel discontent with what one has. I note that no woman, no matter how beautiful, is ever quite satisfied with her looks; and the better looking

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she is, the more troubling are her minor flaws. "She was pretty," says a flapper in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Beautiful and Damned*, "except that she had big ankles." And in the realm of the physical, too, nothing is ever quite satisfactorily repairable—at least not exactly in the way one had hoped. Cosmetic surgeons, I am told, ask to be paid their entire fee in advance for the sensible reason that almost no one is ever entirely satisfied with their work.

In adolescence, my body controlled me. Along with every other boy of my age I knew, I became, in spirit if not (alas) in actuality, a complete, if also completely unfulfilled, sex fiend. I must have thought about other things during this time but none with the same pure concentration as I thought about sex. Adolescent boys, to speak plainly, are beasts. I don't care how well they do on the SATs, how nicely they conduct themselves around the house, or how great their pretensions to be interested in science, sports, music, their computers, or good causes—they are never to be trusted and are probably better assigned to a road gang until the age of twenty-five.

One of the many divisions of humankind is that between those who live in their bodies and those who live outside them. Here social class often enters in. In *My Ántonia*, Willa Cather has her young hero, Jim Burden, compare the immigrant country girls to the richer town girls. He says that outdoor work had given the former "a vigour which, when they got over their first shyness on coming to town, developed into a positive carriage and freedom of movement," whereas the town girls, though jolly and pretty, had "bodies [that] never moved inside their clothes" and "muscles [that] seemed to ask but one thing—not to be disturbed."

I thought of this passage the other day when I saw a famous professor from the university where I teach carrying hand weights as he walked home. He was doing it in such a herky-jerky fashion that I could read into his every step a boy who had never known physical grace. At chamber music concerts, too, most of the people in the audience look as if they have not used their bodies very much. Someone I knew who grew up in the working class, when asked in later life about the difference between the working and the middle classes, remarked that almost everyone in the latter seemed to have retained ten fingers. This made me recall noticing, when I worked in a discount store in downtown Chicago, how many farmers and factory workers had lost fingers in accidents with farm machinery or on the assembly line. With some exceptions (F. Scott Fitzgerald's first description of the wealthy Tom Buchanan in *The Great Gatsby*: his "was a body capable of enormous leverage—a cruel body"), to be of the working class is to live in greater dependence on one's body.

My own adolescent body was efficient enough, but, it almost goes without saying, it was far from everything I wanted it to be. I wished, among other things, for larger arms, especially at the biceps. To help bring this about, I once bought two ten-pound dumbbells and began doing the weight-lifting exercise known as curls, which, out of boredom, I soon gave up. For bodybuilding, I should have much preferred a summer construction job of the kind much admired in my high school days. In such a job you labored at heavy work in the blazing sun for relatively high wages, ate an Italian sausage sandwich and washed it down with a quart of beer for lunch, leered at passing girls, belched grandly, swore profusely among fellow workers, and got a great tan. Or so I idealized such work, which I was never able to get. The closest I came to doing physical labor was unloading trucks in the receiving room of a phonograph needle factory; not enough trucks came in, though, to give me the kind of exercise that would have built me up.

I wished also for the growth of facial hair that would allow me to shave regularly, but it didn't come until I was eighteen or nineteen. I associated the end of boyhood with the beginning of regular shaving. Although I was already taller than my father, I hoped to cheat genetics and to grow a good deal taller still. People in those days talked about boys "shooting up," and it seemed that the time for shooting up was summer. At fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, or even eighteen, boys could suddenly achieve another four or five inches in height. I waited, hopefully, for mine. They never arrived.

It is not all that easy for people with small bodies to imagine living in large bodies, or for large people to imagine living in small bodies. When T. S. Eliot first met Igor Stravinsky, he told him that he expected a taller man: Stravinsky was 5 feet 3 inches and weighed 120 pounds. Stravinsky, in return, had expected

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that Eliot would have "less imposing proportions; his big, rather stolid and cumbrous frame seemed an unnecessarily large refuge even for such over-endowed shyness and modesty as his." I don't know exactly how large Eliot was, but for a man so large he was very adroit at deploying semicolons. Edmund Wilson reports in his journals that Stephen Spender, an immense man, claimed that "he lacked energy on account of being so tall." Aldous Huxley, another tall man, apparently once told Spender that neither of them qualified as geniuses "because when you are tall, your head is too far from your solar plexus." A friend of mine thinks that it is most uneconomical of God to create anyone over six feet tall who is not a good basketball player—"wasted height," he calls it. Dragging my own rather abbreviated carcass around on certain logy days, I feel grateful that I am not a foot taller and a hundred pounds heavier.

At some point in life, not long after adolescence, one has to become reconciled to one's body, to play the cards one was dealt, to say, in effect, this is it, this is the skin I was intended to travel in, and so I shall. And thus, historically, people have done. But not quite any longer. The current belief, widely held, is that we can do a lot to change things: lose weight, tone things up, somehow or other cheat the dealer. We can, I suppose, for a while. I have tried to cheat him myself —I am still at it, puffing away on my NordicTrack WalkFit four or five mornings a week, trudging off, I must somehow believe, into life everlasting.

But finally, as they say in Vegas, you can't hope to beat the House. The House will trip you up in ways you don't expect. For an illness, I once took a drug whose side effect caused something called avascular necrosis, which meant for me a loss of tissue in my hip. So stiffened up was my right leg that I needed to use a cane. Though I was never in great pain, this provided a small lesson in how any minor physical malfunction can upset one's life. One of the wretched things about carrying a cane is that you lose the use of the hand in which you hold the damn thing. I found myself standing at my front door, cane in one hand, two plastic bags of groceries in the other, and no hand free to take the keys from my pants pocket. Or when I needed to use the bathroom in the middle of the night, I first had to locate my cane. A hundred other little inconveniences resulted from the medically caused jiggeroo that prevented my right hipbone from fitting smoothly into its socket.

But this was bush-league stuff. Imagine how desolating it would be to walk around nauseated all the time or to be unable to use your hands or to hear. Imagine being hostage to some devastating debilitating disease such as lupus or multiple sclerosis. Even temporarily unpleasant physical conditions are not all that easily imagined: great thirst, for example, or a horrendous sensation of itching. Dan Jacobson, writing about going down into a Zambian copper mine in his South African travel book, *The Electronic Elephant*, notes that the experience "left me with a thoroughgoing scepticism about the power of the written word ever to convey the inward nature of any extreme physical experience: of war, say, or polar exploration, or even severe illness." Not even the effects of a cold are easily described. Which is partly why *The Magic Mountain*, with its concentrated and sustained description of the effects, physical and mental, of tuberculosis, and *Cancer Ward*, in which Solzhenitsyn does the same thing for cancer, are such impressive works.

In literature the great connoisseurs of the body seem to be the French. The tradition began even before Montaigne with Rabelais, who viewed the body as a magnificent fleshly vessel for containing vast quantities of wine and food (and oh so useful for energetic fornication). Rabelais, with his tales of comic defecation, vomiting, uncontrollable micturation, and other temporary maladies and permanent human indignities, is always reminding us how body-bound we are. "Without health life is not life," wrote Rabelais, "life is not livable. . . . Without health life is nothing but languor; life is but the simulacrum of death."

But, then, Rabelais was a physician, and, as the narrator of Marguerite Yourcenar's great novel *Memoirs of Hadrian* reminds us, "it is difficult to remain an emperor in the presence of a physician, and difficult even to keep one's essential quality as a man." I have always thought the problem might be quite as difficult the other way around—that it is difficult to keep one's essential quality as a man when one is a physician. A part of me much admires physicians, but as great a part is repelled by their work of picking and probing in the big muddy that is the human body. I speak, though, as

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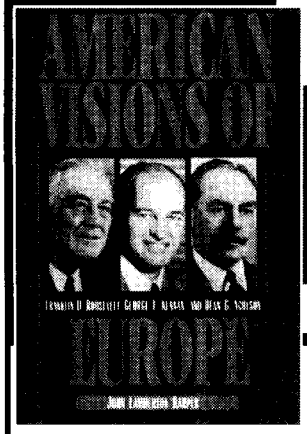

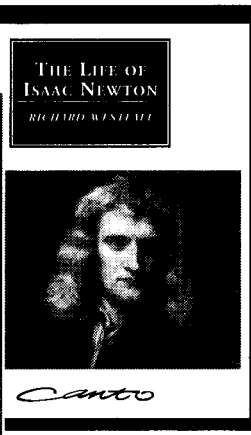

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someone who is quite squeamish. I don't, for example, like to contemplate much of what goes on in my body beneath the skin. I don't even like to think that I possess kidneys, a liver, a spleen, a pancreas, and the rest of it. An old joke has it that a psychoanalyst is a Jewish boy who can't stand the sight of blood. A writer, at least this writer, may be a Jewish boy who not only can't stand the sight of blood but doesn't wish to spend all that much time listening to other people's problems.

While respecting what they do and realizing the need for them, I have tried, to the best of my ability, to steer clear of physicians. I find that, given a chance, they discover things I would rather not know about. But as I get older, I find myself calling upon them more often. I have finally reached the age when I call my physicians by their first names, for I am now older than the various doctors and dentists on, so to speak, my staff. This should be a good thing. Being younger, they are likely to survive me—to be there, as the English say, to see me out.

My internist is, I think, a penetrating diagnostician and a very nice guy: sensible, good-natured, likeable in every way. Yet I cannot say I enjoy his searches upon my body for lumps, bumps, protuberances, dangerous distensions, little bubbles on major veins and arteries. One day, of course, he will find that for which he has been looking. He will call me into his office and tell me—nothing positive of course, nothing for me to worry about *yet*—that he would like to run further tests. I shall respond stoically, with good humor on my face and terror in my heart, joking with him yet knowing that this is it, *ball game.* My body has had enough. Bored with its occupant or repaying old if minor abuses, it has determined to devour itself—and me with it—in disease.

I often envision that day. I am no hypochondriac; only your normal thanatophobe. With death at the door—the Ruffian on the Stair, the poet W. E. Henley called it—I hope to have a little time to cut loose. From my physician's office, I shall betake myself to an ice-cream shop for a banana split, after which I shall stop off for a large packet of a candy I have always been partial to known as Spearmint Leaves. I may pick up a pack of cigarettes. A restaurant known as Chicago Joe's, a steak joint with a specialty in cheesecake and key lime pie, will, in the time remaining, get to see a lot of me. I shall cease flossing.

My guess is that I am not alone in thinking such thoughts, playing out the scenario of being told by a physician that there is little time left; for we all live in anticipation of that moment nowadays. I don't think I go too far when I say that many of us organize our diets and our daily lives so that we can put off that moment for as long as possible. Despite lots of cheating, I try to eat foods that will help me escape colon cancer or a heart attack. Worse to report: when I have eaten carefully through the day, I feel as though I am one up on the Ruffian on the Stair. I assume that he's going to be discouraged and depart because I have had a fruit salad for lunch and salmon and two vegetables for dinner. Foolish of me. He has plenty of patience, the Ruffian.

A few years ago I purchased an exercise bicycle on which, for twenty-five or so minutes every morning, I would ride off into imaginary sunsets listening to Louis Prima and reading magazines. I have now graduated, as I mentioned earlier, to a NordicTrack treadmill. Both of these modern torture racks exist chiefly to help the user lose weight and stay slim—which will in turn, presumably, help the user avoid a heart attack. The true meaning behind all this careful eating and joyless exercise is that I, and countless others like me, have begun to live, at least on the physical level, defensively. The Ruffian on the Stair must smile at our hopeless contrivances to outwit him, knowing that, even if our plan works for a while, his old pal Senile Dementia awaits.

Working out is, as T. S. Eliot described poetry, a mug's game. It is so because one cannot finally win at it. All muscles, after all, eventually break down. *The New York Times* not long ago ran an article on the need for the very old to work out. "Even among the very old, it is never too late to benefit from getting in shape," the article happily begins. It then goes on to cite the results of a study about to be published in that good news/bad news journal of our day, *The New England Journal of Medicine.* Half the people in the study, the article reports, were demented. Even when you are out of your mind, exercise is apparently good for you. How the Ruffian must be giggling!

My own relationship with my body has changed gradually over the years. I used to think it an agreeable companion that yielded me great pleasure on many fronts. Today I look at it somewhat paranoically, chiefly for signs of

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betrayal, for ways it might let me down. The least change or irregularity is worrisome, indicating some (probably) fatal disease. ("Anyone who is afraid of suffering," writes Montaigne, "suffers already of being afraid.") The obituary pages are filled with the deaths of people younger than I. Serious breakdown, while not necessarily imminent, now has to be considered a distinct possibility.

Until four or five years ago, I was a gamesman—I played games to give my body a workout. My last game was racquetball. Racket and paddle games have always been my favorite sports because they don't call for great size but they do put my good coordination to felicitous use. Ping-Pong, badminton, tennis—I was a more than respectable player in all these games. But I think I may have been best of all at racquetball, a four-wall court game that enjoyed a great flurry of popularity in the 1970s and has all but fizzled out today.

I don't want to overrate my ability—when Joe DiMaggio and Marilyn Monroe divorced, Oscar Levant said that he supposed no man could excel at two national pastimes—but I think I was fairly good at racquetball. The game held an aesthetic excitement for me that seems to have been inseparable from every pleasure I have known in games through a long and mediocre athletic career: the clean pick up of a grounder, the sweet swish of the basketball net, the clear *pock* of an overhead smash.

Racquetball gave me the most intense physical pleasure of all. I loved racing back to take a shot off the back wall and send the ball careening off the front wall for a winner. I loved crushing a return of the other player's service down the backhand side. The game had various "kill shots," of which my own favorite involved standing near the service line, waiting until the very last moment just before the ball hit the floor for the second time, and whacking the ball—*whap!*— into the right-hand corner for an unreturnable shot. Sometimes, just before falling asleep at night, I would rehearse that shot—*whap! whap! whap!*—and it gave me delight even to think about it. While playing racquetball my body was on automatic pilot; the horse, so to speak, knew the way. My hip injury put an end to all that.

The other day, a bright Wednesday afternoon, a generous friend took me out to hit some tennis balls, something I had not done for more than a decade. With my hip now healed, I harbored a new fantasy, and I wished to try it out. The fantasy was that I would play a businesslike, middle-aged game of tennis, without any of the old competitiveness of youth, any of the anger directed at myself for errors of judgment and prowess. I thought I might hire a young pro to rally with me, to smooth over those things in my game that had become too rough. Maturity, late to arrive though it may have been, would at last be in the saddle. Mild-mannered, middle-aged tennis would be the ass on which into Jerusalem I would ride, in white shorts, shirt, and shoes, graphite racket in hand, the very picture of cool and natural elegance, playing this happily controlled tennis game.

It didn't work out as I had planned. Not only did I fail to hit many balls well—my forehand was particularly atrocious; my backhand, a more grooved stroke, was still intact—but even those balls I did hit well gave me, as Rene Lacoste might have put it, *non frisson.* Or, as the telephone answering machine of Will ("The Thrill") Clark, the first baseman of the Texas Rangers, is reported to announce, the thrill is gone. The magic wasn't there; the fantasy refused to take wing. Ken Rosewall and Rod Laver needn't worry; neither is likely to be knocked out of the early rounds of a senior's tournament by an amiable, unseeded, altogether unknown midwesterner with red elbows, purple ankles, and slightly drooping buttocks.

I have decided to put off my comeback as a tennis player because, without the physical pleasure, it all seems pointless. Hitting a service ace, a crisp volley, a crosscourt winner—the prospect of these acts no longer lights my fire. A new, and distinctly different, set of fantasies is required. So, too, is a new relationship with that now old companion, my body, or, as the kids say, me bod. My mother lived to the age of eighty-one; my father is still alive at eighty-six. With luck and enough safe meals, I might be walking the planet for another twenty-five or so years.

Little as I wish to own up to it, I have begun thinking about my body less and less as a receiving room for pleasure and a hall for physical delights. It won't do any longer to think myself Fred Astaire or Jim Thorpe, let alone Casanova. Shocking to confess, I am a man who stares furtively (I hope) at beautiful women. But I remind myself that my interest in such matters is now not even theoretical

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but entirely museological. Similarly, when I lose my temper over poor service or a breach of etiquette, I have to understand, more poignantly than ever before, that the notion of a physical threat behind my loss of temper is quite pathetic. ("What else could I do?" I imagine the service manager at my car dealership patiently explain over beers with a friend about his stormy dealings with me. "I had no choice. I punched the old guy out.") The time has come when I really have to take seriously the dictum to act my age.

I have been reading Sherwin B. Nuland's best-selling book *How We Die.* A book not excessively loaded with jokes, Dr. Nuland's. I don't think I shall be giving away the plot when I report that the answer to the question posed in his title is that we die too quickly or all too slowly, drearily, painfully, sloppily, undignifiedly, horrendously, but—and here is the genuinely bad news—inevitably. "We rarely go gently into that good night," he writes. He reports that "our own bodies are simultaneously and subtly undergoing the same inexorable process that will lead eventually to senescence and death." Dr. Nuland has enough grim material well in hand not to have to bring up the little unpractical jokes the body likes to play, such as giving an abscessed tooth to a man who is fighting leukemia. He is especially strong on what the brain loses in functioning power after the age of fifty. I would pass some of this information along to you, but, being fifty-seven myself, I don't remember most of what he wrote.

Sometimes I see my reflection in a store window or in a restaurant mirror, and I am a little shocked. Who is this grayish, rather sour-faced fellow? It takes me a second to remember and then another few moments to remind myself to get used to him. He and I have to come to terms. So many people I know in their eighties have told me that, in their minds, they feel forty or fifty years younger. In my own late fifties, I still think of myself as in my thirties. It won't do. My body daily gives testimony that it won't.

The body is the reality in which each of us is grounded. The world surely looks different to a man of 350 pounds than it does to a man of 130 pounds. Not only do we obtain much of our information about the world through our senses—which is to say, through our bodies— but, as all philosophers of good standing can convincingly argue, our senses enjoy almost nothing so much as deceiving us. The limitations of knowledge are best exhibited in the lack of control we have over our physique. Mind will go only so far over matter. Did their logic, asks Montaigne, console Varro and Aristotle for their gout? Does having read Proust twice all the way through make having stomach flu any easier? It's a serious mistake to forget for a moment that we are held hostage by these fleshly prison cells, our bodies.

All things considered, the one assigned to me hasn't been a lemon. Despite its compactness, it is sufficiently commodious. It has chugged along pretty well and required relatively little servicing. Since by now it is long out of warranty, I hesitate to take sharp corners with it or to to put it to endurance tests of any impressive kind. With so much mileage on it, breakdowns oughtn't come as a surprise. Replacement parts, they say, are possible to obtain, but about this I remain a bit dubious. A new body, clearly, is called for, but what dealer would take mine as a trade-in?

Thrift and prudence may, with luck, make one wealthy. Thoughtfulness and learning may, with even more luck, make one wise. But there stands the body to mock both wealth and wisdom and every other kind of accumulation. The body exists to demonstrate, if demonstration is needed, that progress has its limitations. "Every day in every way I get better and better" is a notion that the body refutes. Beyond a certain point one ceases to grow stronger, more beautiful, more desirable. Neither all the king's personal trainers nor all the king's cosmetic surgeons can put any of us together again. The body reminds us that we are in the swim only for a short, however glorious, while. Then, no matter what one's station in life, or what one's natural endowments, the whistle blows and it's everybody but everybody out of the pool, and that includes you—which is to say me—Narcissus, baby.

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Latin Fanatic

A Profile of Father Reginald Foster

ALEXANDER STILLE

A MAN IN A BLUE POLYESTER JUMPSUIT surrounded by a small crowd stands at the edge of the Palatine Hill in Rome overlooking the ancient *circus maximus* at sunset. To the tune of a Gregorian chant, he sings a hymn to Apollo by the poet Horace in clear, fluent Latin. This is not a pagan rite of a group of modern sun worshipers; it is a typical day in the life of Father Reginald Foster, a Carmelite monk from Milwaukee, Wisconsin. For the last twenty-five years, Foster has served as Latin secretary to three different popes, and today he is the senior Latinist to Pope John Paul II.

For Father Foster, Latin is anything but a dead tongue. A man of phenomenal energy, he wakes up well before dawn to say Latin Mass and to start preparing and correcting the hundreds of Latin homework sheets he assigns each week. At about 8:30 A.M. he goes to the Vatican to perhaps the only job in the world where he can write and speak Latin in the course of ordinary business. Father Foster translates the Vatican's public proclamations into the official language of the Church and gives, as a kind of full-time Latin missionary, free Latin lessons to anyone who is willing to study. After working in the Vatican all morning, he teaches until evening, and, on his day off, he takes his pupils to visit Roman sites where they read Latin texts in their original context. During the summer, Foster offers intensive, free courses for Latin teachers from around the world, to whom he imparts his original approach to the language in the hope that they will spread the gospel when they return home. He is a kind of one-man Audubon Society for the Latin language, determined to save it from extinction.

Living in Rome I kept hearing stories about Foster's singular relationship with Latin. I met people who had sung Latin songs with him to the cows of Castel Gandolfo—site of the emperor Domitian's villa

✪ ALEXANDER STILLE is the author of *Benevolence and Betrayal: Five Italian Jewish Families Under Fascism.* His book about the war against the Mafia in Sicily, *Excellent Cadavers,* will be published in the spring by Pantheon.

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and now the Pope's summer residence. A friend described her surprise at tramping through the ruins of Ostia Antica and suddenly hearing someone telling ribald jokes in Latin. It was Foster, of course, showing his class the two-thousand-year-old graffiti on the bathroom walls of the old Roman port city.

Although he is one of the world's finest Latinists, Foster insists on teaching Latin at all levels, including the most elementary, so that he can make new converts. I decided to take his introductory course to see for myself.

For the last eighteen years, Foster has taught at the Gregorian University, center of Jesuit learning in downtown Rome. The building's exterior, bristling with papal tiaras and coats of arms, has the imposing air of a fortress. Huge studded metal doors lead to an equally prepossessing two-story atrium presided over by a life-size statue of Jesus.

The introductory course, with more than seventy students, is filled largely with novice priests and nuns wearing the cassocks and habits of various orders, from somber black to bright blue. Most of the seminarians—in keeping with the change in the Catholic clergy—are from Africa and Asia, where Catholic traditions are now hardiest. Their names—echoing those of popes, saints, and martyrs—recall the bygone era of the Vatican's mighty temporal power: Ignatius, Innocent, Clement, Hyacinth, Linus, Titus, Bernardino, Vincent.

But beyond the setting and composition of the class, resemblances between other classes at the Gregorian and Foster's First Experience (as he calls his introductory course) quickly break down. Outsiders—as long as they are seriously committed—are welcome to take the course, for free. Foster is impatient with traditional church pomp and formality. "We'll call each other by our first names, freedom and joy and all that," he says with a twist of self-irony. Instead of his monk's habit, Foster always wears his metal blue polyester jumpsuit: blue pants, a matching windbreaker, a wash-and-wear blue shirt, and heavy black work shoes. He does not wear a clerical collar. The outfit combines a blue-collar work ethic with the Spartan simplicity of the monastic ideal and does not call attention to Foster as a "holy man." He looks as if he might sooner check your carburetor or fix your boiler than reveal the mysteries of Ovid or St. Augustine.

Father Foster is a fit-looking man of fifty-four, with a round, ruddy, balding head and wire-rim glasses. The thin wreath of hair that runs above his ears looks a little like a medieval tonsure. His spectacles, his wide, open face and friendly smile give him a mild-mannered, unworldly appearance—an impression dispelled almost as soon as Foster opens his mouth. His deep, sandpapery voice projects loudly through

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the class; it starts out at a low growl, but rises suddenly, when he is trying to make a point—which is most of the time—to a thundering sonic boom or to a high-pitched screech. Foster delivers his introductory class barking like a drill sergeant breaking in a bunch of raw recruits to the rigors of Marine boot camp.

"You don't have to be all that intelligent, but Latin takes a little bit of toughness," he growls. "I hope you are all here voluntarily. I don't like the idea that some of you have been pushed into this classroom by some *requirement,*" a word he pronounces with the utmost scorn and distaste. "Because if that's the case, I'd like to push you *right back out.* If you have to take Latin and don't want to, there is a list here, and you can just put your name on it and leave. And I will give you a passing grade for the year. I'm interested in teaching Latin to people who want to learn. So, if you *don't* like me or you *don't* like Latin, then you can leave and that will be that. Got it? If you want to learn Latin, we'll learn Latin. I don't care if you are registered. You can sit here for five years and not be registered. I don't know how much they're charging downstairs—I think it's too much."

There is nothing pleading or apologetic about Foster's presentation of Latin. Many teachers treat Latin grammar as if it were a bad-tasting medicine that will eventually prove beneficial—a few dull years of memorizing conjugations and declensions that have to be put up with before slogging through Caesar's *Gallic Wars.* Foster does not concede an inch, firmly convinced that from the very first class the study of Latin should be a revelation of the greatest urgency and importance.

"Why do you want to study Latin? *The question is, Why don't people want to study Latin?*" he asks the class in a loud rhetorical shout, pacing back and forth in front of the blackboard. "If you don't know Latin, you know nothing! I had my first experience of Latin forty years ago, and I have not been bored by Latin for ten minutes in these forty years. Latin is one of the greatest things that ever happened in human history."

When Foster begins to shift into high gear, he picks up in speed and volume, like a high-performance car moving into overdrive. "If you don't know Latin, you're sitting out there on the sidelines—don't worry, most of the world is out there with you. But if you want to see what's going on in this whole stream of two thousand years' worth of gorgeous literature, then you need Latin."

Foster distributes a ten-page photocopied handout—a sampling of Latin literature from the comic playwright Terentius (185–159 B.C.) to a papal decree of 1990. This is the closest we will get to a textbook all year. "I am going to put real Latin in front of you. We are studying what Latin is on *planet Earth,*" he booms. "One of the things I don't like about these textbooks they give you is that they fool around with

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these phony little made-up sentences. We are going to deal with real sentences from the first day."

After this little introduction, Foster rolls up his sleeves and starts to explain his teaching method. "There will be no grammar books, no textbooks. You are going to have me—whether you like it or not. That's the system. Every student is going to get a good Latin dictionary." The students are required to come to class on Monday and Friday and to do homework sheets that Foster invents twice a week. "You work this thing all by yourself," he says. "The idea is that you teach yourself. This sheet is due a week from now, there won't be class on Friday because there's some kind of nonsense over at St. Peter's basilica." He is referring to the anniversary of the canonization of Saint Birgitta, a Swedish nun of the fourteenth century.

The reason Latin is generally boring, Foster says, is that it is taught all wrong. The grammar is presented as an enormous and complex abstract system of bizarre and arcane rules divorced from its actual context inside a real and living language. "People are not told what Latin is all about," Foster says. "They are just told to memorize all the forms, the conjugations and declensions. Latin has nothing to do with memorization. Every bum and prostitute in ancient Rome spoke Latin and they didn't learn it by memorization. *Got it?*" *Got it?*—generally pronounced in a raspy growl—is a constant refrain in the Reginald Foster experience.

Foster tries to get students to stop thinking in English and to enter the Latin frame of mind by immediately stressing some of the difficulties and peculiarities of the language. "The hardest thing for people who have grown up speaking English or one of the Romance languages is to grasp the fact that Latin does not depend on word order," Foster explains. "That is the thing that drives people crazy. In English you more or less have your subject, you more or less have your verb, and you more or less have your object. If I say 'Jane sends Jim to me' and then change the order of the words, the whole meaning changes. It becomes: 'Jim sends Jane to me' or 'To Jim Jane sends me.' The meaning of a Latin sentence does not come from the word order but from the word endings. It means that if I write *'Marcum Joanna mittit,'* I can have them in any order, and it will mean the same thing: 'Jane sends Mark.' I pick this up from the endings, the *-um* indicates object, the *-a* indicates subject. By changing the ending, I am changing the function. But I can make it *'Mittit Marcum Joanna,'* and there's no change in meaning. That's what the whole thing in Latin is all about: *an infinity of possibilities.* Infinite combinations and the word order is *free!"* he shouts, emphasizing *free* like a discounter announcing an unbeatable sale.

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As he promised, Foster plunged us, from the very first day, right into real Latin texts: Cicero, Petronius, and the Latin Vulgate Bible, which meant that learning grammar was never separated from the enormous aesthetic pleasure of the language itself. Thus, once we had finished identifying the subject, the object, and the verb, we found ourselves staring at sentences of extraordinary beauty.

To illustrate his point about word order, Foster had us look at a letter that Cicero wrote on June 13, 44 B.C., to his closest friend, Atticus. Because so many of Cicero's letters survive, and because they are written in such a fresh and direct fashion, they capture his daily life in all its particularity as if in suspended animation, the way the volcanic ash and lava of Vesuvius preserved Pompeii and Herculaneum. Reading them is like accidentally overhearing a conversation from two thousand years ago.

"*L. Antonio male sit, si quidem Buthrotiis molestus est!*" the letter begins, meaning: Let Lucius Antonius be hanged, if he's going to be obnoxious to the Buthrotians! "*Molestus* like *molest, annoying*, or *obnoxious*," Foster says. Cicero is commiserating with Atticus over a real estate deal in northern Greece (Buthrotum) that has gone sour. He moves on to his own nagging financial problems—a constant of his correspondence—then turns to the heart of the matter, the burning political situation following the death of Julius Caesar.

"'*Reginam odi!*'" says Foster in a stately, dramatic voice. "'*Regina*' is the word for '*queen*'; '*odisse*' is the verb '*to hate*,'" he says. "Like *odious*, got it? *Don't say 'The queen hates!' The queen doesn't hate anyone!*" Foster screams at full volume. "It says: 'I hate the queen!' Notice, the object comes first, the verb last. '*Regina*' becomes '*reginam*' when it's used as an object.

"The queen is Cleopatra. Oooohhh," he croons. "Julius Caesar had been in Egypt and had spent about nine months playing around with Cleopatra. If you've been in Trastevere [a neighborhood in downtown Rome just across the Tiber River], you may have seen an area called the Horti Caesaris—the road of the Gardens of Caesar. Caesar brought her back to Rome and had her living in his gardens over in Trastevere. When I go home tonight, I will pass right by the gardens that Cicero is talking about here. So when Cicero writes this letter, this queen is floating around Rome, and Cicero says, 'I hate the queen!' She was right down the street in Trastevere. She was thrown out of Rome after Caesar's assassination. Cicero hates the Queen. See what Latin's all about?" By now, his voice has dropped to a stage whisper, and the class is in rapt silence.

"'*Superbiam autem ipsius reginae.*' Once again Cicero is starting his sentence with the object. '*Superbiam*' means '*haughtiness.*' The haughtiness of the queen herself, '*cum esset*,' 'when she was,' '*trans Tiberim*,'

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'across the Tiber,' '*in hortis*,' 'in Caesar's gardens.' '*Commemorare sine magno dolore*,' 'remember without great pain,' '*non possum*'—finally we have the verb—'I cannot . . . I am not able.'" He then reads the whole sentence. "The haughtiness of the queen herself when she was living in Caesar's gardens across the Tiber, I cannot recall without great pain in my heart!" Foster becomes so excited that he exclaims, "*It's out of this world! Latin is simply the greatest thing that ever happened! Don't let yourself go, because you might just fall in love with it!*"

For Reginald Foster (or Reginaldus as he is sometimes known), Latin was love at first sight. He can still remember vividly his first Latin class in 1953 in St. Francis Minor Seminary in Milwaukee, when he was thirteen. "I saw right away how clever it was," he says. "I liked the way you could play around with this and say so much just with the little endings and switch things around. It was like a little puzzle. It seemed kind of mysterious and clever. I decided this Latin thing was going to be my endeavor, my contribution."

Except for one year in Milwaukee, Foster has spent the last thirty-two years living in the Carmelite monastery attached to the church of San Pancrazio on Rome's Janiculum Hill. The monastery is simple, spare, and modern, with linoleum floors and plastic furniture, like an elementary school or a budget motel. But the monastery's pleasant, tree-lined grounds occupy some of Rome's finest real estate, sharing the same view as the splendid seventeenth-century Villa Doria Pamphili, the suburban retreat of the family of Pope Innocent X.

Foster is exactly where he wants to be, doing exactly what he always hoped to do. "By the time I was fifteen years old I wanted to be three things in life: First, as a little kid, I wanted to be a priest. Second, I wanted to be a Latin teacher. Third, I wanted to be a member of a religious community, rather than a diocesan priest. And so, by the time I was fifteen, I knew I wanted to be these three things, and since then I have never had a moment's doubt about any of them. No wandering around until I was thirty figuring out what I wanted to become."

Foster wanted to be a priest from as far back as anyone in the family can remember. At the age of six, according to his mother, Margaret Foster, young Reggie tore up old sheets to use as vestments, and—instead of playing cops and robbers—he pretended to be a priest and perform mass. Mildly embarrassed by this maternal revelation, Father Foster explains: "A lot of kids did that in those days. It wasn't quite as strange a thing as it might seem today."

This early religious and scholarly vocation seems to have been entirely Reggie's idea. His family was Catholic but without particular emphasis. Foster's father and grandfather were both plumbers, and

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his mother was a housewife. Reggie was a straight-A student and valedictorian of his eighth-grade class in parochial school. His brother, Tom, still runs the family plumbing business, and his sister, Susan, is a housewife and mother.

Foster's interest in language was stimulated by the severe German nuns who taught him in parochial school. "The sisters were very into this grammar thing," Foster says. "They taught us English grammar until it came out of our ears. We had to have it perfect. I liked that very much."

Aside from school and church, young Reggie had a series of solitary interests that he pursued with quiet but total dedication. From books he took out of the library, he taught himself to play the organ and to swim.

When Reggie Foster graduated from grade school, he decided to enter St. Francis Minor Seminary, a Catholic high school for students who intended to become priests. The arrival of adolescence coincided with a quantum leap in his already intense religiosity. "When I was twelve or thirteen I got really turned on by religion, most of which I've abandoned now," he says laughing. "I went through a period they call scrupulosity—this is a famous syndrome that psychologists have studied. It's a time in life when people become especially religious, and puberty is one of them. I was almost out of my mind: I was committing mortal sins every other minute. It was terrible. I couldn't laugh. I couldn't even look at a woman because it was a sin. I thought everything was a sin. I started reading *The Lives of the Saints*, about the penances they did and so on. I was driving everyone crazy with my religious fanaticism, candles, all that. It wasn't my parents who were pushing this on me—they thought I was a little crazy. I thought my parents were very bad, that we should be saying the rosary and prayers at every meal. This is natural when you're twelve years old. You grow out of it. In the midst of it, I decided to join the priesthood."

Some people were concerned that Reggie took things too seriously. One day a woman in the neighborhood saw him standing alone in front of a statue of the Madonna in the parish church with tears streaming down his face. The woman telephoned Margaret Foster to tell her what she had seen. "I thought it was ridiculous. I wasn't that upset," said Mrs. Foster, not long before her death in 1992. But she did talk to their priest, who told her: "They go through a stage like that."

In the throes of this personal crisis, during the summer between freshman and sophomore years of high school, Foster decided he wanted to be a monk and live apart from the world. "I wanted to belong to a religious community. The Carmelites were a perfect middle ground for me. I didn't want to be a complete hermit like a Cistercian. But on the

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other hand, I didn't want a place like a train station or a boardinghouse. Our order really has the best of both. There's perfect silence here; there's prayer together but a lot of solitude and study. I like being able to turn it on and off. When I am outside, I am very much on; when I come home, I'm a complete hermit."

As the idea to join the Carmelites crystallized, so did Foster's consuming passion for Latin. Even though his first-year Latin course was taught according to the old method of memorization, he was totally absorbed by it; he took the textbooks home during his summer vacation, learned them backwards and forwards, and returned to school ready for advanced Latin. "That whole training in English grammar I had had with the nuns, of analyzing things linguistically, switched over and blossomed in Latin," he says.

In the fall of 1955, at age fifteen, Foster left Milwaukee for the Monadnock Mountains of New Hampshire, where the Carmelites had their training seminary. Waiting for him, when he got off the overnight train from Chicago to Worcester, Massachusetts, was a young Carmelite monk named Conrad Fliess, who immediately struck up an animated conversation in Latin. For Foster, it was like a revelation: suddenly this mysterious ancient language, which he had studied in silence, leapt off the page and came to life. The two men rattled on in Latin all the way back to New Hampshire in the seminary van. "He was all wild for Latin," Foster says. "We had Latin plays and had to write Latin compositions every week. He saw right away that I already knew Latin very well, and so he tutored me. We were great friends and remained so until the end of his life. Meeting this man changed my whole deal, my whole approach to Latin."

The move to the Carmelite seminary proved providential in many ways. "That's what really got me going," Foster says. "I would have been like most people had I stayed [in Milwaukee]. I found the Carmelites, and I love them very much." Living in a sympathetic religious community also helped Reginald get past his painful period of scrupulosity. "I saw other young people like me who didn't have this problem. And there were some priests who talked with me and helped me. It just disappeared. It's almost like having glasses—you just see things in a certain light, which was that of sin. If I took a toothpick off the table, I was stealing from my parents. [Later] I just started seeing things differently."

Foster spent three years studying with Fliess in New Hampshire, where he learned German, ancient Greek, along with the standard religious training, and, of course, intensive Latin. He officially joined the Carmelite order in Boston in 1959 and then went out to a Carmelite monastery near Milwaukee to do an advanced degree in

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philosophy, where he was reunited with Father Fliess.

In 1962 Foster began theology training in Rome. His arrival at the center of the Roman world was the culmination of all his years of passionate study. "The day after I came to Rome, I went to the Roman Forum, and I saw all this stuff that I had read about as a kid and studied—the place Cicero gave his orations. I just lost my mind. Here was this whole living language which I had come to love in the United States. To come here and to imagine—as I still like to do—people walking around the Forum speaking Latin. To read Cicero's orations out loud and hear the same words bouncing off the walls that bounced off the walls in Caesar's presence in September of 46 B.C. It's just too much!"

Foster's insistence on Latin as a living language may seem eccentric and bizarre to some—like Don Quixote setting off in medieval armor trying to revive the age of chivalry in seventeenth-century Spain. But it is easy to forget how much more prevalent Latin was only thirty years ago, when Foster received his religious training. Not only was the Mass said in Latin, all of Foster's classes—theology, philosophy, canon law, archaeology, and church history—were taught in Latin. All priests were required to take seven or eight years of Latin, and everyone in the Catholic church, from San Francisco to Sidney, had some degree of proficiency in Latin. International Vatican meetings were conducted in Latin. Popes, cardinals, and bishops corresponded and sometimes conversed in it. The current Pope, Karol Wojtyla, wrote his doctoral dissertation in Latin when he was a student in Rome. The Pope's Latin, Foster says, "is a little on the spaghetti side, but totally functional." "Spaghetti" or "macaroni" Latin is Foster's term for highly Italianized Latin.

"All priests knew Latin," he says. "It was hard in those days. If you said 'I want to be a great Latinist,' you were competing with everybody in the class, and in every class around the world. When I see some of my old colleagues, we still converse in Latin. It used to be totally normal. Now it seems like some divine gift. Anyone who knows some Latin is a man with one eye in the land of the blind."

The great decline of Latin began in the sixties as a result of the Second Vatican Council (1962 to 1965), which attempted to modernize radically the Catholic church. Although all the meetings of Vatican II were conducted in Latin and the council took no steps to eliminate it, Latin became one of its unintended victims. "In all the upheaval—which I think was very salutary—Latin got clipped. It was inevitable. Latin was identified with the old system . . . Latin tyranny. Anyway, they threw all the old statues on the junk pile, and Latin went on the junk pile with the statues."

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Aside from the junking of Latin, Foster was delighted with the reform of the Church. "It was just sensible and rational," he said. "We're just treated like adults now, that's all. Under the old system, we were treated like *bambini* [*children*, in Italian] in the name of obedience. In 1962, you couldn't go out the front door without permission, and there was silence at meals. You got to go out once a week for a walk. At ten o'clock all the lights had to be out. You couldn't stay up reading. Lord, help us, you couldn't have any money. If you needed two hundred lire [about fifteen cents], you had to go to your superior. It was a reign of terror. But in those days it wasn't a horror story because we knew nothing else. Now, it's a totally different world. We're much more responsible. I have certain tasks, I take care of my work, and that's it. The rest they don't even ask about. They can't put that toothpaste back in the tube. Some people would like to, but it's not going to work."

The demolition of the Church's millennial Latin legacy was equally swift. Foster was spared the painful moment of transition. Called back to Milwaukee in the spring of 1967, he returned to his monastery in Rome a year later and found a different world. All the public notices and signs in the monastery that had been written in Latin were now in Italian. Latin had been removed as the teaching language, and now all the classes were in broken Italian. "That whole system was demolished, taken down, burned up, and melted, and that was it," Foster says.

Rather than linking it to the reactionary elements in the Church, Foster identifies Latin with the tradition of Christian humanism—the Renaissance scholars and churchmen who passionately studied the texts of the ancient world: St. Thomas More, Erasmus of Rotterdam, Pope Leo X, Pope Pius II, Pico della Mirandola. For Foster, the humanists represent the most enlightened and tolerant tradition within the Church, the forebears of the more open-minded ecumenical spirit of the modern Church.

As Foster was finishing his graduate studies, an old cardinal who had been the Latinist to three popes asked him (in Latin): "So what are you going to do with all this Latin?" "*Deus providebit*" (God will provide), Foster answered. As fate would have it, Foster would be called on to fill the cardinal's old job. In 1969, when one of the pope's two principal Latinists, Amleto Tondini, who held the ancient title of Secretary for Briefs to Princes, died of a heart attack, Foster, at the age of thirty, was selected to take his place. Foster had been chosen by the other Latin luminary of the Vatican, Carolo Egger, Secretary of Latin Letters to Pope Paul VI, who had been enormously impressed by Foster when he had him as his student at the Institutum

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Pontificium Altioris Latinitatis (the Pontifical Institute of Higher Latin Studies).

The office of Latin secretary has a long and distinguished history, stretching back to St. Jerome, who was secretary to Pope Damasus (366–384). St. Jerome left his enduring mark by translating the Bible into the famous Latin Vulgate, which served as the Bible of the Western world from the fourth century A.D. until the Protestant Reformation, when there was a proliferation of new vernacular translations. In the Catholic world, Jerome's Vulgate continued, until recently, to be the principal Bible. Because of the absolute centrality of Latin within the Church, the Latin secretary was traditionally one of the pope's closest advisers and generally lived in the pope's apartments at the Vatican palace.

On Foster's arrival at the Vatican, the august but archaic title Secretary for Briefs to Princes was replaced by the more modern-sounding Latin Language Department of the First Section of the Vatican Secretariat of State—which is where Foster works to this day. Foster's job includes composing the pope's official correspondence—letters to bishops and archbishops—and translating Vatican communiqués, ceremonial speeches, decrees, and encyclicals.

Through much of the 1970s, Egger and Foster handled the entire volume of work by themselves—a job now handled by a department of seven people. "And the workload has nose-dived," Foster says. "When I think of the good old days, we were writing letters all over the world!" Even fifteen or twenty years ago, the Vatican could effectively use Latin as its principal tool of communication and expect that prelates around the world would understand it. Increasingly, Latin is being reduced to a merely ceremonial or decorative function—like the colorful uniforms worn by the pope's Swiss guards or the elegant calligraphy that adorns official Vatican invitations. There is some talk about eliminating the calligraphy department as an unnecessary extravagance, and Foster is worried that one day in the not-too-distant future the same will happen to the Latin department. "There is no illusion about Latin taking off. It's not," Foster says with disenchanted realism. "It's definitely going down." At a recent synod of European bishops, Pope John Paul II chose to give his final address in Latin, but, says Foster, most people didn't have any idea of what he was saying. For the moment, anyway, the Vatican Secretariat of State remains an oasis of Latin activity. Foster and his colleagues communicate exclusively in Latin. A Franciscan monk poked his head into Foster's office when I was visiting, and they chatted briefly in rapid, colloquial Latin. The one phrase I picked up was "*medicum dentium*" (doctor of the teeth)—the Franciscan was on his way to the dentist.

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Foster's own office is as spare as can be—three plants and, until recently, no decorations on the wall. He has had a continuing feud with one of his bosses, who keeps trying to get Foster to put up a crucifix and a photograph of the Pope—standard issue in most Vatican offices. During one tussle, Foster told him, "If you bring those things in here I will sell them at Porta Portese! [the local flea market]." Finally last spring, the church hierarchy prevailed and installed the photograph and the crucifix, with the image of the pontiff placed, curiously, above that of the redeemer. Foster prefers the extreme simplicity of the early Christians to the pomp and bureaucracy of the modern Church. Passing by a nicely (but not luxuriously) furnished Vatican conference room, he points. "That's where all that collection money is going!" he says, laughing a mischievous, boyish laugh.

Nonetheless, Foster is rather indulgent of the extravagances of the Renaissance popes who built the Vatican palace—especially if they were great patrons of Latin. He makes sure to point out the wonderful little bathroom that the painter Raphael frescoed in Pompeian style for Cardinal Bernardo Bibbiena, humanist adviser to Pope Leo X. Not only does the room show Raphael's fascination with the newly discovered wall paintings of ancient Rome, it is also a typical expression of its patrons, the learned Cardinal Bibbiena, and Leo X, who himself cultivated a fine Latin prose style.

Despite his pessimism about the fate of Latin within the Church, Foster continues to fight the good fight, composing new late-twentieth-century Latin prose, convinced that Latin's marvelous flexibility and concision continues to make it a living, breathing language even in this "*Aetas Informaticae disciplinae*" or age of the computer.

"The problems are not things, like photocopiers or computers," says Foster, "but all the jargon going around. There are so many concepts that the Romans didn't really have: 'Power sharing'; the 'realization of the organization of work'; to 'SCUD' something; 'They acclimatized themselves.' *Se accomodaverunt locis et temporibus*, 'they adapted themselves to places and times,' which is much nicer, it's much more concrete."

From the moment he arrived at the Vatican twenty-five years ago, Foster must have seemed a singular presence. He drove to and from work on a little Ciao motorbike. At the time, he was seriously overweight, weighing nearly 250 pounds, and, as he sped along atop his "motorino" in his monk's cassock, he must have looked like a circus bear riding a bicycle.

It was only after 1974, when he began to teach, that Foster came into his own, creating his persona and life mission. He started taking off his cassock when he was teaching because it was getting covered

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with chalk. Then, when he was at home one August, he found his trademark blue jumpsuit sitting on a rack at JC Penney's. It seemed to speak to him, answering all his needs. "I need something very durable. I want to do my own laundry—the nuns used to do our laundry, which I never liked. I want something perma-press, neat and trim. And this is the kind of thing that workers in America wear, the gas-station attendant or the electrician. It keeps its shape and color for about a year and a half. Twenty dollars for clothes every year and a half is not bad. They have my name and measurements at Penney's. I am for simplicity—I have two blue shirts and that's it. I don't have any hair, so I don't have to worry about it. You save all kinds of time and money by having nothing to choose." The only time he has worn his Carmelite habit recently was when he came home to see his mother in Milwaukee. Proud of having a monk for a son, she wanted to see him in his traditional garb. So on the flight between Detroit and Milwaukee, he did a quick change in the plane's bathroom and emerged in his cassock.

In order to stay within the measurements of his jumpsuit, Foster has to wage a daily battle against fat. "I have to watch my diet something terrible," he says. As a result, soon after Foster gave up his cassock, he also gave up his place in the monastery dining room. As Foster began to concentrate more and more on teaching, he developed his own separate life. He wakes up at 3:58 in the morning so that he can listen to Voice of America on his shortwave radio at 4:00. Up before anyone else in the house, he sings Mass in Latin by himself in the chapel at 4:30. He is in his room at 5:30, ready to start work. He works on Latin until about 8:30, when he leaves the monastery and walks down from the Janiculum Hill to his job at the Vatican. He walks from there to the Gregorian, where he teaches all afternoon. He usually gets home at about 8:00 P.M. and works preparing or correcting Latin homework until about 11:00 P.M. when he goes to bed. "I sleep about five hours, which is enough," he says. "Life is short; I don't want to spend my life sleeping."

Foster's schedule became more and more rigorous as he kept expanding and developing his teaching program. He started teaching informally, borrowing various classrooms around town from 1974 to 1977, when the Gregorian invited him to teach a course. Gradually, at his own initiative, he has built up his current curriculum of five "Latin experiences." There are four levels of Latin language instruction and one level (the Second Experience) of Latin conversation. In 1985, he started his summer course. The Latin literary tours, which are a part of the course, continue to increase in number. But the heart of Foster's mission is in the classroom, where he is trying to turn traditional Latin instruction on its head.

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For well over a hundred years, Latin has been codified into an arcane system of declension and conjugation tables, which students were expected to memorize before beginning to read Latin authors. Since it is considered a dead tongue, Latin is virtually never spoken in class and often not even read aloud. Latin literature has been defined narrowly as the literature of ancient Rome, ending at about 300 A.D., despite the fact that for at least another fourteen hundred years dozens of the greatest minds of Western thought—St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, Erasmus, St. Thomas More, Descartes, Spinoza, Galileo, Newton, and Leibniz (to name only a few)—wrote part or all of their work in Latin. (Many important Latin dictionaries do not even list words and meanings that entered the language after the second or third century A.D.)

Students spend years repeating verb forms—*amo, amas, amat, amamus, amatis, amant*—as if they were a series of magical incantations. The nouns are taught in declensions, listed almost invariably in tables following a standard format, and are taught in the same order, because it's easier (at least initially) to remember things in a singsong sequence, just as we teach children to repeat the alphabet. Many teachers specialize (even at the university level) in mnemonic tricks to help students keep the conjugation and declension tables straight. At the highly regarded summer Latin program at the City University of New York, students are taught rhyming ditties like "In conjugation number three, the sign of the future is long *e*; in conjugation number four, the *e* of the future appears once more." These mnemonic games can even be fun—like learning to recite Lewis Carroll's nonsense poem "Jabberwocky"—but it is a knowledge divorced from understanding.

Foster, instead, explains the inner logic of the language from which the grammar naturally flows. Latin—unlike English or any of the Romance languages—is an inflected language, meaning that the ending of a word changes as its function changes. The role of a noun in the sentence (whether something is a subject or an object) and all of the connective tissue between words (*to, of, from, by,* etc.) are encoded in the endings. If you understand the function a word has in a sentence, then you will understand quite naturally—and without undue memorization—what ending it should take.

Not only does Foster not require you to memorize forms, he actively prevents it. In order to get around memorizing declension tables, he teaches one case at a time. For the first three months of class, Foster hammered away at the idea of the subject and object (we never heard the words *nominative* and *accusative* cases). The point is to understand the function of the word in a sentence and to see how a word changes when it goes from being a subject to being an object.

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The form is, therefore, always connected to its function. Not only is it more interesting to learn grammar this way, it is more effective. If you understand the way the grammar works, what you learn sticks with you. When you learn grammar rules mnemonically, as soon as you stop repeating the singsong jingles, you forget them, which is why most people can't go beyond the first line of "Jabberwocky" and can only remember "*Amo, amas, amat . . .* " from their years of Latin training.

In order to avoid rote learning, Foster never teaches verbs in the usual *I, you, he/she/it, we, you, they* sequence. Rather than ask a student to repeat an entire verb tense, he breaks up the pattern and changes the verbs, asking: "He sings?" (*cantat*); "They praise?" (*laudant*); "We ask?" (*rogamus*). By using this method, the form is never separate from its meaning, and the student has to think about each response rather than rely on the automatisms of his or her reptile brain. Endings, he explains, are not an arbitrary set of sounds but ways of expressing ideas. The Romans express the third person singular (*he, she, it*) with a *t*, as in *cantat*. In the plural it becomes an *nt* (*cantant, sunt*, they sing, they are). The Romans say *we* through the ending *mus* (*rogamus*). *I* is expressed either as *o* (*amo, rogo, laudo*) or *i* (*amavi*, I loved) or *m* (*amabam*, I was loving). *You* singular is expressed with an *s*, while *you* plural becomes *tis*, whether it is *es, estis* (you are) or *ambulas, ambulatis* (you walk). Once you understand—and hear—this as another way of expressing *I, you, he*, you can add new tenses easily without memorizing entire verb tables.

The intuition at the core of Foster's method is to treat Latin like a living language. Grammar is always reinforced by immediate contact with Latin literature so that it is seen in context and learned inductively. "The students have to let Latin grow on them," he says. "What do we do with other languages? We go to Italian class. Meanwhile we see billboards, we see television, we see the newspaper, we overhear people on the bus, and all the while we're studying it. We start picking it up. This is learning a language naturally." Foster believes that students should not only read Latin from different periods and styles, they should hear the language, speak and write it. And while the First Experience is taught almost exclusively in English, he reads and has students read passages aloud in Latin. With each level he gradually introduces more and more spoken Latin. He will begin a Third Experience class by describing something he saw on the way to class—a pickpocketing on the bus—or by asking a student to describe the weather. By the Fifth Experience most of the class is rattling on in Latin. Foster recognizes that Latin is never going to be a widely spoken language, but it has to be taught as a language and not as a brittle,

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dried parchment in a glass case. What Foster advocates seems so simple and logical as to appear completely obvious, and yet it runs counter to the way the language has been taught for more than a century.

Just how unusual Foster's oral Latin method is became obvious when two experienced Latin teachers tagged along on Foster's literary tour of the Roman Forum; they were agog when he suddenly broke into fluent, colloquial Latin describing Cicero's problems with his no-good son. "*Pater eius cupiebat ut haberetur par educatis omnibus aliis adulescentibus. Ah, quia senatores divites omnes mittebant filios suos ad studiorum universitatem Atheniensem*—Harvard, Princeton, got it?" (His father wanted him to have the same education as all the other kids—all the rich senators were sending their sons to study at the university in Athens—Harvard, Princeton, got it?) "In years of graduate school and twenty-one years of teaching, I had never heard anyone speak Latin," observed Margaret Brucia, who has a Ph.D. in classics and is head of the foreign language department at Port Jefferson High School on Long Island.

"The incredible thing is that he can speak fluently in just about any Latin style and pronunciation from any period," says Bernard Frischer, chairman of the classics department at UCLA. Frischer, too, in all his years of training and teaching, had never heard spoken Latin before meeting Foster. "I was skeptical because, like many classicists, I had heard that the Church Latin spoken by the priests was of a very poor quality." Frischer decided to make a video of one of Foster's Latin tours. "I had asked him to speak in classical style, and he was using an extremely complex Ciceronian style, with sentences that were a paragraph long, with several dependent clauses, and corresponding nouns, adjectives, and verbs miles apart from each other. At the time, I was wondering whether he was making any mistakes, but when we transcribed the tape and analyzed his sentences, everything lined up perfectly."

Frischer is now convinced that the traditional approach to Latin just doesn't work. "When I came to Italy for the first time in the 1970s after finishing my Ph.D., I lived with an Italian family. After six weeks I spoke and read Italian better than I did Latin, which I had studied for more than ten years and of which I was a professor," says Frischer.

The fatal mistake of most Latin textbooks and teachers is to try to make Latin seem as much like English as possible; they use invented Latin sentences that follow English word order or, if they use real Latin, they doctor it to make it conform to English syntax. Even the greatest and most complex authors write straightforward sentences that can be read immediately and used as examples of basic grammatical constructions. Thus as we were learning subjects and objects,

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verbs or relative pronouns, Foster had us hunting down examples in passages from Terence, Cicero, Ovid, the Vulgate Bible, the natural history of St. Hildegard, or a papal proclamation from 1990.

Already in the second class, Foster showed us a passage from the *Satyricon*, the great comic, surrealistic novel of Petronius Arbiter, whose refinement was such that he was made "arbiter" of taste at the wildly decadent court of the emperor Nero. (Later, Nero, in his paranoia, forced Petronius to commit suicide.) Foster set the scene: "The narrator is sitting by himself at this banquet and he is trying to figure out why there is a wild boar running around the *triclinium* [dining room] with a hat on its head. He is wearing the type of hat reserved for slaves who have been freed. Crazy stuff. The narrator screws up his courage to ask the person next to him what this wild boar is doing running around the banquet with a freedom hat on. The guy looks at him and says, 'Any slave could tell you that—*non enim aenigma est, sed res aperta.*' '*Aenigma*'—meaning just what you'd expect—is the subject, so the sentence is: 'It is not an enigma, *sed res aperta*—but an open thing.' "

Then one of the participants at the banquet stands up and says, "*Dies nihil est*" (Daytime is nothing). "*Dum versas te.*" "*Dum*" means *while*; the verb is *versare* (to turn). So the sentence is: While you turn over [in bed], *nox fit*, night falls. "This guy sleeps all day and eats and drinks all night," says Foster. *Itaque nihil est melius, quam de cubiculo recta in triclinium ire. "Nihil est melius quam?"* Foster calls on someone. (Although there are about seventy students in his First Experience, by the second or third week, he knows everyone by name.) "Nothing is better than," comes the answer. "Than what? Where's the verb? At the end of the sentence, *'ire,'* to go. Nothing is better than to go, *'de cubiculo recta in triclinium,'* from the bedroom directly into the dining room. This is how they lived under Nero—don't be scandalized, friends." Translating, he says, "It's cold when I get up, but *'Tamen calda potio vestiarius est'*—Nevertheless, a hot drink is like a set of clothes. It's not St. Augustine. *'Matus sum,'* I am soaked," Foster explains. "In *'Vinus mihi in cerebrum abiit,'* the subject is clearly *'vinus'* (wine); the verb *'abiit'* (vanished, gone), once again, is at the end of the sentence; *'mihi in cerebrum'* (into my brain)—*cerebrum, cerebral,* got it? 'I am completely soaked, the wine has gone up into my brain.' This is Latin, friends, of 1,930 years ago. They were doing mostly the same things we do. They had the same virtues and vices."

In the middle of all this wild banqueting and crazy speechifying, a voice of realism speaks up: "*Narratis quod nec ad caelum nec ad terram pertinet, cum interim nemo curat, quid annona mordet.* What is *'narratis'* going to be?" he asks. "You—plural—'*narrate,*' *'quod'*—that which. What's the verb that goes with *quod*?" Foster yells with urgency.

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"*'Pertinet'*—pertains—that which pertains—*'nec ad caelum nec ad terram'*—neither to heaven or earth. You people are talking about that which pertains neither to heaven or earth, *'cum interim,'* when in the interim, *'nemo curat,'* no one cares, *'quid annona mordet.' 'Annona'*—is the price of bread, or the cost of living, how the cost of living bites, *'mordet'*—mordant, got it? See in the midst of all this banqueting, the cost of living is biting."

Translating for a moment, he says: "'For a year now, I can't find a mouthful of bread, and the drought keeps on.' Then look at this phrase: *'Aediles cum pistoribus* COLLUDANT.' *'Aediles'*—judges, plural, subject—*'colludant'* (third person plural) are colluding *'cum pistoribus'* with the bakers. So the judges are in collusion with the bakers and they are getting all the bread during the drought. *Serva me, servabo.* You take care of me, I'll take care of you. It's like the Mafia, see? That's how they talked in the streets of Rome."

Reading this ironic satire of corruption under Nero, we began to get an idea of why the emperor might have forced Petronius to commit suicide. Used to thinking of Latin as something remote and stuffy—oaths to gods and goddesses, centurions crossing the river, and edifying tales of "pious Aeneas"—it was almost a shock to discover such earthy colloquial language. *"Annona mordet."* The cost of living bites. *"Serva me, servabo."* You take care of me, I'll take care of you. But what takes ten words to say in English, Petronius says beautifully in just three. "*That's* what Latin is all about!" Foster says.

What enables Foster to get away without textbooks and forms are his extremely rigorous and ingenious homework sheets, known as the *Ludus domesticus* (literally: home game or, more loosely, game to be played at home). The *ludi* (plural) are deftly constructed engines of thought, which force students—while working through important passages of literature—to master the grammatical problems they are dealing with in class.

Each sheet introduces the students to a new author—with passages plucked from Foster's seemingly inexhaustible storehouse of Latin literature: the comic playwright Plautus, St. Thomas Aquinas, the Stoic philosopher Seneca, the poet Horace, the Church Father Petrus Chrysologus, the etymologies of St. Isidore of Seville, the English Renaissance medical doctor Thomas Linacre. Aside from their aesthetic merit, the passages are chosen to illustrate a particular grammatical construction: the genitive case, reflexive verbs, the passive voice, the comparative.

Foster will often start out by giving a passage, but before asking for the translation, he will make students answer a series of questions that force them to pick apart the grammar of the sentences: If a certain

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word is a noun, then what is its role in the sentence? If that is the case, then what is the verb? What tense is the verb? What noun must such-and-such adjective modify? Why? Write out the same sentence changing it from singular to plural. By the time you've answered the questions, you've decoded the whole passage, and the translation generally comes quite easily.

The *ludi* are written in Foster's inimitable style, both hyperbolic and humorous. They are composed on a typewriter that has no lowercase lettering, only two kinds of uppercase—the perfect typographic equivalent of Foster's voice, which has only two volumes, loud and louder! The *ludi* are also marked continually with underlinings and exclamation points so that reading a *ludus* is like hearing Foster.

A couple of *ludi* give an idea of Foster's singular style: "ROME'S GREATEST AND ONLY REAL PHILOSOPHER, THE SUPER-STOIC LUCIUS ANNAEUS SENECA [4 ANTE–65 POST CHR.], HAS SOME SENTENCES FROM HIS FAMOUS 'MORAL LETTERS' WHICH YOU CAN AND MUST UNDERSTAND AFTER TWO DAYS OF LATIN."

Ludus number 30 began with the following paean to his hero St. Augustine: "THE GREAT MATURITY, WHICH YOU HAVE NOW OBTAINED IN LATIN STUDIES, WILL FINALLY ALLOW YOU TO UNDERSTAND THE SPECTACULAR LANGUAGE AND APPRECIATE THE HEAVENLY CONTENT OF THE VARIOUS WRITINGS OF THE DEEPEST MIND IN THE WHOLE WESTERN WORLD, AURELIUS AUGUSTINUS [354–430 POST CHR.]."

Although each *ludus* fits on a single page, Foster usually creates a dense forest of about one thousand words, with several different passages and scores of questions. Although they are fun—combining the pleasures of reading a good book and doing a crossword puzzle—it can take the better part of a day to finish a *ludus*. Each one functions like the chapter of a textbook.

While Foster has been teaching at the Gregorian for seventeen years, he continues to write new *ludi* for each of his courses every year. Once, when I asked him to give me the next homework sheet a few days in advance because I was going to have to miss a class, he said: "I don't have the sheet for Friday. I haven't made it up yet." In other words, as often as he has taught basic Latin, he is still inventing it afresh, trying to react to the needs and progress of each new group of students. So, along with correcting about 240 sheets a week, he has to invent eight different *ludi* for his four basic classes, hunting for new passages and thinking up new questions for each of them. This is why he gets up at 3:58 A.M.

As word of mouth about Foster's courses has spread, the numbers have increased, increasing his workload. But Foster excludes the possibility of allowing an experienced assistant to help him correct home-

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work. "I wouldn't allow that, it would be shirking my responsibilities," he says. "I believe the teacher has to work harder than the students."

Foster's eagerness to teach Latin is such that he finds it almost impossible to turn down a serious student. Aside from his students at the Gregorian, he conducts a kind of correspondence course with a convict in a federal prison in California, who wrote to him for help in learning Latin. "He wrote asking me where he could find certain books, without mentioning that he was in prison," Foster explains. "So I wrote back saying they would be in the nearest library. He wrote back explaining that he would not be able to get there until about the year 2010—I don't know what crime he committed—so I sent him some books.

But for all the hard work, Foster is committed to the notion that learning Latin must be fun or it shouldn't be done at all. His classes are always punctuated by extravagant utterances, shouts, howls, whistles, dramatic renditions, comic mimicry—even singing. In part, it allows him to express his lively and imaginative personality; in part, it is a calculated device to keep his students' attention.

From the plays of Plautus, Foster has been known to teach his students such Latin insults as *"vervex"* (muttonhead), *"vomitus"* (a puke), and *"caudex"* (a block of wood, a blockhead). He enjoys shocking his classes of young seminarians at the Gregorian by making irreverent comments about the Vatican or showing them mildly racy passages of Latin literature. For example, he picked a passage from *De Animalibus* (About animals), a natural history written by the German nun St. Hildegard (1098–1179), as a tool to study the comparative—"*Asinus est plus calidus quam frigidus*" (The ass is hotter than he is cold)—and as a highly amusing observation of sexuality. "*Fere caecus de superfluitate naturae, quam in libidine habet*" (When [the ass] is in heat [*in libidine*] he is nearly blind [*fere caecus*] from the excess of lust [*superfluitate naturae*]—literally, superfluity of nature). "The sexiness of the jackass makes it practically blind," Foster explains. "This was her objective study of nature as seen from her convent window! Don't worry about the philosophy," he reassures the seminarians. "Even St. Thomas Aquinas said some silly things."

It is part of Foster's conception of Latin instruction that it include all things from the ridiculous to the sublime, like life itself. During the annual class trip to Ostia Antica, we read everything from Cicero and Virgil to the graffiti in the so-called House of the Seven Sages, a bathroom in an ancient Roman apartment complex. Poking fun at the self-importance of philosophers, the frescoes here represent Greek sages offering bathroom humor in the form of philosophical maxims: "*Bene caca et declina medicos*" (Shit well and avoid doctors) says

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one philosopher in clearly legible Latin. "*Mulcine sedes?*" (Mulcinus, are you still sitting there?) says another. *"Propero!"* (I'm hurrying!) comes the reply. "This is Latin from seventeen hundred years ago!" Foster says. Changing key, we went from the bathroom to the building where St. Monica, mother of St. Augustine, is thought to have died, and we read a long, moving account from Augustine's *Confessions* of his mother's death.

Foster is not only trying to shock and amuse his students by introducing them to Petronius or St. Hildegard's reflections on the mating habits of jackasses and bears, but he wants to show that they are part of his vision of Latin and the Church. "For me Latin is liberating, and the humanists were broad-minded," Foster says. "I gave the Fifth Experience some epigrams by St. Thomas More. Some of these epigrams are very risqué—not obscene, but crude and very funny. He said: 'Look at that woman riding the horse,'—not sidesaddle, got it? 'If she can get her legs around a horse, she can get her legs around any man.' This is St. Thomas More! Humanists. Real neat stuff. Brilliant. Wonderful! This idea that Latin is like a lead blanket—it's not, it's liberating."

Foster then starts laughing as he remembers a description St. Thomas More gives of a man getting seasick over the side of a boat. "More writes, 'You are very charitable; you have this mutual relationship with the sea. You just ate some fish from the sea and now you're giving back to the sea what you ate.' They weren't afraid of those things. Now it's so phony and prudish. What we're missing is this happiness, this healthiness that Christian humanism would bring. We can't even joke about ourselves, about life, bodily functions. They weren't afraid of *amorini* [naked cupids] or of nude statues. There's a certain kind of hypocritical conservatism. We can't talk about this or we can't talk about that."

While some might regard the celebration of nudity and sexuality in authors like Catullus, Petronius, and Ovid as antithetical to the celibate priesthood, Foster disagrees. "[Celibacy] is a choice and a way of life," he says. "A lot of people do it for different reasons. . . . I can still appreciate that stuff. Let's live!"

Foster has come a long way from the years when he stood weeping in front of statues of the Virgin. "In the beginning the Catholic Church was this gorgeous monolith, an unchangeable institution, and Latin was just one of the glories of the Church, like St. Peter's basilica. That all collapsed because they found out that the Church was changeable. And now, my vision of Latin and the Church is, I would hope, much more mature and more rational. I need to know why she [the Church] says what she says, and what the sources are,

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where the categories are coming from. This is all from Latin. St. Bernard paraphrases Virgil. And Augustine is quoting Horace. St. Thomas quotes Cicero in his famous *Summa Theologica* 196 times. This is a continuity that's very nice for me to see. Now, of course, [the Vatican] wouldn't quote Cicero. Out of the question. It would be seen as pagan or something. The humanists took what was good and solid in the pagans."

In his years at the Gregorian, Foster has watched his own program flourish while the general condition of Latin deteriorates. Originally, his course at the Gregorian was supposed to be a kind of finishing school for those students who needed to round off their Latin education. But as more and more students were arriving with little or no Latin training, he began offering an introductory course. Although Latin is no longer a required course at the Gregorian, students are expected to have a working knowledge of the language and must take a proficiency exam when they enter.

"Supposedly, we have 3,500 students at the Gregorian; only 120 need Latin, and the others are fine," he says. "The Latin situation at the Gregorian is a disaster," he says. "You have these professors quoting Latin passages to the students, and they might as well be quoting Chinese." Confirmation of his gloomy assessment of the state of Latin at the Gregorian came this year when the university stopped teaching canon law in Latin—the last course to hold out against the change. "They can't find teachers who can express themselves with any grace and ease in Latin," he says. "They were making up baby sentences in their head when they wanted to spew out all kinds of golden wisdom on church law. Twenty-seven years [after the end of Vatican II] there is a whole generation that knows very little. It's like stopping piano training throughout the U.S. for a generation. A couple of generations later, it will be totally dead. I think that is totally tragic."

If Latin is dying in the Catholic Church, there are some signs of revival outside the church. After a period of swift and steady decline in the United States, Latin study is enjoying something of a revival.

In the 1930s, more than half of American high school students took Latin as part of their standard curriculum. The numbers remained fairly high until the early 1960s, with some 702,000 students still taking Latin in public high schools alone—while hundreds of thousands of others studied the language in private schools. But in the decade that followed, Latin enrollment in public schools collapsed, dropping to a mere 150,000 by 1976.

Latin appeared on the point of extinction. "Somehow, a subject that had been considered for more than a century a staple in the general education of very large numbers of American high school

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students . . . was suddenly considered irrelevant," writes Sally Davis, who teaches Latin at Wakefield High School in Arlington, Virginia. "The crash was the result of the craziness of the sixties," says Davis. "Relevance was the catchword of the day, and Latin wasn't relevant."

Since its nadir in the mid-1970s, however, Latin has made a modest comeback. Davis estimates that Latin enrollment is now at about 190,000 in the public high schools, with a similar number in private schools. Latin remains the third most popular language in American public schools after Spanish and French.

With the steady decline in the United States of basic reading and writing skills, many schools turned back to Latin. Statistics show that students taking Latin do better consistently on their SATs than students who don't. Moreover, Latin has been used effectively in recent years to improve language and logic skills among students at poorer inner-city schools, according to Richard Gascoyne of the New York State Department of Education, which sponsors a number of such projects. "There are plenty of good reasons," says Sally Davis. "About 70 percent of the words in the English dictionary come from Latin. Once you learn about 150 Latin roots, that will give you a command of maybe a few thousand words. And it is the basis for all the Romance languages."

Latin has also had some success in selling itself to both sides of today's education debate. It appeals to those who argue for greater "cultural literacy"—since the Latin language and Roman civilization are so central to the Western tradition. At the same time, Latin can respond effectively to the concerns of both multiculturalists and Afrocentrists. Rome was a supremely multicultural society; it included people from across North Africa, Asia Minor, and the Middle East, as well as most of Europe, who became not only citizens of the Roman Empire but often its leaders as well.

In the attempt to defend and revive Latin, American teachers have also tried to find new ways to teach it, exploring alternatives to the rote memorization of grammar. There is much more emphasis on Roman civilization, on etymology and word building, on learning grammar by induction from reading rather than by the studying of forms. In New York State, Richard Gascoyne is trying to introduce more spoken Latin in classes. In some ways, Foster is in the mainstream of this change. Indeed, a number of influential Latin reformers have come to Rome to study in Foster's summer program.

Frischer of UCLA would like to revolutionize Latin teaching by introducing a new curriculum based directly on Foster's oral method. He is hoping to get financial support for a project that would, in essence, "clone" Foster. The idea would be to bring a sizable number

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of Latin professors to Rome to become fluent in Latin and develop a series of textbooks and videocassettes to apply his method nationwide.

In the tight-knit fraternity of American Latin teachers, Foster's summer course has become legendary. "For anyone who loves Latin, it's like heaven," says Davis. "Finally here is someone who loves the language, who truly knows the language, knows how to teach it, and who loves to teach it with unbounded enthusiasm and energy that never stops. . . . This was like finding the place I've been looking for my whole life."

But Foster remains a one-man institution, with no ties to any of the various philological and pedagogical associations promoting Latin studies. He remains, in fact, harshly critical of the American academic establishment and is not sure whether some of the current reforms aren't as bad as what they are trying to replace. This conflict came to a head when Foster was invited to give the final address at a conference in 1992 at the American Academy in Rome given by members of the College Board and by teachers who were preparing the high school advanced placement examination.

During the afternoon, Foster sat with increasing impatience during a long, soporific session in which teachers and testers discussed the weighting and grading of exam questions, the problems with the multiple-choice section, and the methods of preparing students for the examination. When a teacher from Atlanta, Georgia, explained how he xeroxed exercises out of a certain textbook because he didn't have time to make up his own, Foster made a groaning noise like someone whose appendix had suddenly burst.

By the time Foster approached the podium, his normally ruddy complexion was redder than usual. "Most of what I'm going to say is not going to please you, but that's all right. Latin, for me, is a completely different thing than what I've heard since four o'clock. Teaching Latin as preparation for an exam has no place in my concept at all. I'm troubled by this business of using Latin for remedial purposes. Latin was not devised to help people with English. It's like the people who play the piano to help them with their arthritis. You don't study Mozart because of arthritis, and you don't study Latin because your school is a disaster! After what I've heard today, I'm surprised that anyone is taking Latin!" Foster said, with the fury of Christ tossing the money changers out of the temple. "The AP thing sounds like the typical American quick fix. Some way to hurry things up and push them through so that they come out . . . with a degree and not much education."

Foster criticized the old-fashioned textbooks that rely on memorization and railed against the new textbooks that rely on little Latin

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stories made up by the authors about a typical Roman family. "I saw this in an Oxford [University Press] textbook—this is absolute madness," he says. "After two volumes, the students are still reading sentences made up by the authors, not by real Latin authors. So that after two years the students have not moved one inch. They've learned all about this melon-headed family from Pompeii, but they've never seen real Latin. The word order of the sentences is the same, the verb is in the same place. Why don't we start with some easy stuff right from the beginning: *'Multum te amamus'* (We love you very much), Cicero writes to Atticus. Why not start with that the first day? 'No, we don't do Cicero until the fourth year.' Who says? You can take two or three lines from Cicero's letters that may be very easy and are just out of this world."

When, in the third or fourth year, they finally get down to reading real Latin, Foster went on, they tend almost exclusively to read poetry—Virgil, Horace, and Catullus. "What is this obsession with poetry? Why don't we get into some of these prose people? Poets are gorgeous and wonderful, but, if you were to be shown nothing but poetry in French or Italian, it would be very hard to get to the language. I don't think the Romans on the street talked in verse.

"It seems that with Latin we refuse to do what we do in other areas of life," Foster said. "With other languages you hear and see the thing right away, but teachers refuse to do it in Latin. When we teach swimming, we put the students in the water. But what we do with Latin is we keep them on the sidelines and tell them: 'You see, this is what water's about,' instead of getting in there and doing it. Or, we say, 'Let's talk about the theory of the piano,' and we let the students just sit there for three years looking at the piano instead of pounding out a few tunes. But have them play a few sonatas that are so gorgeous that they're knocked off their feet, and then they'll pass any examination.

"Someone said, 'I don't have time to do this.' I shouldn't have time to do this either, but, if I don't, I'll get out of it and not teach. We've got to decide what we want to do. Either we're going to teach or we're going to do something else. I love Latin too much to mistreat it," he says.

When Foster finished his jeremiad, the crowd appeared somewhat stunned. "I've been waiting for years to meet Reginald Foster, and he's a little different than I expected," said Barbara Weiden-Boyd, professor of classics at Bowdoin College and a member of the group that prepares the AP Latin exam. Her husband, Mike Boyd, summed up the general mood. "I came expecting to meet Mr. Chips and I got the Terminator."

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Despite his lack of diplomatic skill, Foster has attracted dedicated students from Australia and Ghana to South Dakota and San Diego. "He has a loyal fan club around the world; it becomes a central part of who they are," says Bernard Frischer. The number of students in his summer course—meant primarily for teachers and other advanced Latinists—continues to multiply every year. What started as an informal gathering of five people in 1985, has grown to more than forty students—more than Foster would like. Foster refuses to charge for the course and has a hard time saying no. Several return to take the course for a second or third time, which—given the grueling schedule—says a lot. The intense group experience has fostered numerous romances and more than a couple of marriages. Two recent students told Foster that they would not get married unless he came to Maine to officiate at their wedding.

Foster's summer course is practically a Latin marathon. After working at his usual morning job at the Vatican, Foster teaches from two until six, then has optional classes *sub arboribus* (under the trees) in the garden at his monastery, from seven to nine, in which students read, drink wine, and talk in Latin until the sun goes down. "And after that he would tutor whoever needed it," says Sally Davis, who studied with Foster during the summer of 1987 and, again, in 1992. After spending six days in class, the students spend the seventh day—far from being a day of rest—on one of Foster's Latin literary tours. Some of the trips—like the ones to Pompeii and Herculaneum, to Cicero's birthplace at Arpinum, to Horace's Sabine farm, and the tour to Thomas Aquinas's birth and death places—are all-day affairs lasting anywhere from twelve to sixteen hours.

Paul Gwynne, a historian of Renaissance Latin literature, stumbled onto Foster's course in 1991 and was so impressed he dropped everything to stay in Rome so he could take all five of Foster's levels simultaneously. "He is not just the best Latin teacher I've ever seen, he's simply the best teacher I've ever seen," says Gwynne, who has had the opportunity to see some excellent teachers while getting a Ph.D. in classical studies at the Warburg Institute in London. "It's a Renaissance historian's dream come true," he says. "Studying Latin with the Pope's apostolic secretary, for whom the language is alive, and using the city of Rome as a classroom have changed my whole outlook on life. Historical texts are presented as living things," says Gwynne. "I loathe Thomas Aquinas and medieval scholasticism—but the Thomas Aquinas tour was one of the most delightful days of my entire existence. Climbing up that mountain into that ruined castle, reading about the birth of Thomas Aquinas, then singing some of his songs. You're not just given a text of one of his hymns, you're out there

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singing it. Then you clamber down the hill to Fossanova, sit in the room where he died, and read a moving account of his death. Suddenly this whole world of medieval scholasticism comes to life. That's something that a lot of medieval historians don't do and can't do. Then you go and get drunk in a pizzeria. What could be nicer than that?"

All the elements of Foster's method come together in his Latin literary tours: each of the senses is engaged as you hear, read, speak, and sing Latin while seeing the sights and smelling the smells that Cicero, Horace, Plautus, or St. Augustine saw and smelled. The Roman world from its highest to its most frivolous literary expressions comes off the page and takes shape around you as the ruined monuments of antiquity momentarily assume their former life.

Seeing Rome with Reginald Foster is somewhat like a tone-deaf person hearing music for the first time. The city is threaded with a vast web of Latin inscriptions. They line the cornices of buildings, the bases of statues and monuments, the tops of fountains and gates. The biographies of tens of thousands of dead souls are carved onto tombs and sarcophagi. They provide a running commentary on all you see, although virtually all of Rome's three million inhabitants walk by them without noticing them. To see Rome without having access to this Latin subtext is like going to the opera without a libretto—you can love the music, the singing, and the spectacle, but you miss a lot of the drama.

For Foster, the air buzzes with meaning, and the words of Cicero, Tacitus, Martial, and Livy tug at his ear. The intersection where Via Cavour and Via dei Fori Imperiali meet is the place where the emperor Augustus placed a series of busts from the Republican era to remind people of the old Roman virtues. Outside the Colosseum, where pushcarts now sell soft drinks and postcards, stood a massive statue of Nero; it was decapitated after the emperor killed himself. A bare plot of ground in the Forum is the spot where Cicero gave his famous Catalline oration; on that pile of rubble, the emperor Caligula built himself a temple and declared himself a god; here along a crowded sidewalk, shopkeepers from before the time of Christ had their stores and hawked their wares to potential customers on their way to the Capitol.

There are, of course, many other classicists who know ancient Rome, but very few have Foster's extraordinarily broad range. Foster knows the classical authors backwards and forwards and is steeped in medieval Latin and the doctors of the Church; he knows the glories and vices of the Renaissance popes and the inscriptions on all the Egyptian obelisks erected by Sixtus V. He is as interested in the Latin

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on Mussolini's Fascist monuments as he is in the dedications on the buildings commissioned by the emperors Augustus and Hadrian.

More than just a walking encyclopedia of Latin literature, Foster also has an active imagination and a theatrical talent for conjuring up the past. When we were walking across the Palatine Hill—the green residential area in ancient Rome that overlooks the Roman Forum—Foster took us down to the cryptoporticus beneath an imperial villa where Caligula is believed to have been assassinated. As we stood looking at the elaborate stucco work in this underground passageway, Foster read the scene from Suetonius and, when he came to the denouement, shouted, "Repete! Repete!" (Again! Again!) and could not help himself from making a stabbing motion with his arm at a spot on the ground where the hated emperor might have lain. Foster's dramatic skills are such that the BBC radio broadcast large segments of his annual Ides of March tour in honor of the death of Caesar.

At the beginning of each tour, Foster hands out a xeroxed leaflet with as many as fifteen dense pages of text, all of it relating to the places to be seen that day. He will often describe a site or event by using passages from seven or eight different authors—plucking out lines of poetry, long-vanished inscriptions, even a passage from an eighteenth-century Latin encyclopedia—to create a multi-layered richness that corresponds to the palimpsest of Rome itself. For example, on the tour of the Colosseum and the Palatine Hill, he gave us 101 passages from 24 different Latin authors. He also read aloud from some writings we passed that had been scratched onto the walls of slave quarters now buried underneath the Palatine. For the Ides of March walk, Foster gave us not only Plutarch's famous account of Caesar's assassination—which Shakespeare used in his play—but also a page of the correspondence between Caesar and Cicero at the time of the Civil War (49 B.C.) that installed Caesar as the first Roman emperor. The letters describe the terrible psychological predicament of Cicero: Caesar is advancing rapidly from the north, Pompey is in the south, in retreat, and Cicero is in the middle at his villa near Formia, trying to decide what to do. He knows Caesar will win, but, in the end, he backs Pompey, because he is sure Caesar will destroy the Republic. Meanwhile, Caesar is trying to woo Cicero to add prestige to his cause, and the correspondence between the two of them in the summer of 49 B.C. is a complex game of cat and mouse and elegant wordplay.

"Look at what Cicero says to Atticus in the next letter," Foster says to the crowd of thirty or so standing around dodging cars in the streets of Rome. "Cicero notices that in Caesar's letters asking for support, he uses the word *'ops,'* which, if you notice, friends, means

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help in the singular, but in the plural often means *resources, money.* So Cicero—who was a very clever man, says: '*quibus iam opes meas, non ut superioribus litteris opem exspectat.*' 'In which letter he is asking for my resources, not, as in the previous letter, for my help,' " says Foster, translating literally. Then Foster offers his own free translation: "So Cicero says: 'Now what does he want? My bank account!' " The tour ends in front of Caesar's statue just outside the Forum, with Foster leading the group in a Latin song to Caesar sung to the tune of "My Darling Clementine."

Foster pokes fun at himself and even at his favorite Latin authors. He enjoys the absurdity as well as the glories of the Roman world, which the Romans, with their well-developed sense of irony, never fail to notice. Visiting the site of Cicero's house on the Palatine Hill, we read a serious account of its destruction by Cicero's political enemies along with a humorous letter Cicero wrote about hearing his next-door neighbor snoring. "*Haec ego scribebam Marcellus candidatus ita stertebat ut ego vicinus audirem.*" (As I was writing this, Marcellus the candidate was really snoring so that I, his neighbor, could hear.)

The same day, as we were passing the house of Augustus Caesar, Foster read from a passage in Suetonius, which, after listing the emperor's many virtues, mentions that he wore *calciamentis altiusculis,* literally *higher shoes* or *elevator shoes.* It is typical of both Suetonius and of Foster not to miss such a small telling detail that, quite literally, brings his subject down to human size.

To keep things from getting too solemn, halfway through many of his walks, Foster will break out and pass around a huge bottle of inexpensive jug wine—adding an element of celebration to the occasion. Because he does not take himself too seriously, he does not mind when curious bystanders—fascinated by a monk in a blue polyester jumpsuit declaiming in Latin—suddenly interject themselves into one of his outings. Foster enjoys the give and take and absorbs it into the experience. When we were standing in the neighborhood that once held the theater of Pompey, a local resident, who fancied himself a knowledgeable Cicerone, came over to explain about the assassination of Caesar. Rather than dismissing the man, Foster invited him to tell us what he knew. "They stabbed Caesar twenty-three times," the man said in Italian. Foster then pointed to our reading sheet and found the passage in Plutarch saying that Caesar had indeed been stabbed twenty-three times. "Even today, in Rome," the man said, "twenty-three is a lucky number." Plutarch's reference to the number of wounds on Caesar's body may explain why many Romans today pencil 23 on their lottery cards.

In the same vein, Paul Gwynne recalls a similar moment on a trip

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to Horace's Sabine farm in the countryside in Latium near Rome. The group had clambered through the weeds and brambles to find the remains of Horace's house and a Roman fountain to which Horace dedicated one of his most beautiful poems, the "Fons Bandusiae." The group read the Latin poem and talked about it, then read Virgil on Horace along with various commentaries, ancient and modern. But then, the local custodian, charged with looking after Horace's estate, wanted to join the group and recite the poem in Italian. "This guy was five-foot-nothing, as tall as he was wide, with a dark complexion—glowing with life. It was wonderful, because we had just read a description of Horace, which said he was about five-foot-nothing and as tall as he was wide, with a dark complexion. And so you've got this guy—who obviously enjoys life in the country—who recites this poem of Horace about the fountain which we're all standing in front of. It was almost as if the country gods had come down and said, 'Here we are.'"

These uncanny moments happen a lot when you spend time with Foster: for someone for whom Latin is a living language, time seems to bend, past becomes present and present, past, and the long-banished *genii loci* appear to return.

These moments appear especially precious because they are probably unrepeatable. Although he is still going strong at fifty-four, Foster shows no signs of wanting to leave behind a legacy. He has many intensely enthusiastic students but no disciples. Since he doesn't believe in textbooks, he has never written one. For his Ph.D. thesis he was supposed to write a textbook, using the letters of Cicero, to teach Latin, but he still hasn't gotten around to it. "I don't have the time," Foster says. "Maybe when I get too old to keep on teaching." But few of his students believe that he will ever stop teaching; most believe that when Foster goes it will be in mid-sentence, hammering away at a passage of Cicero or St. Augustine. "If he couldn't teach at the Gregorian, he'd be out on the street, teaching, and none of the students would mind. If it rained, they'd bring an umbrella," says Gwynne. "How many people do you know who can inspire that?"

As the school year came toward an end, someone in the class suggested that he at least publish a collection of his homework assignments, the *ludi*, in book form. "You see these?" he said, picking up a batch of homework sheets. "You know what will happen to these in a few weeks? I'll burn them all." He destroys his elaborately constructed work sheets, so that he has to reinvent his courses every year, making each course new and unique.

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Pariah Science

Whatever Happened to Cold Fusion?

DAVID GOODSTEIN

THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON COLD FUSION took place on the island of Maui, in Hawaii, December 6–9, 1993. It had all the trappings of a normal scientific meeting. Two hundred and fifty scientists took part, mostly from the U.S. and Japan (hence the site in Hawaii), but also a sprinkling from Italy, France, Russia, China, and other countries. More than 150 scientific papers were presented on subjects such as calorimetry, nuclear theory, materials, and so on. The founders of the field, Stanley Pons and Martin Fleischmann, both of the University of Utah, were in attendance and were treated with the deference due their celebrity status. Pons and Fleischmann carry out their research today in a laboratory built for them in Nice, on the French Riviera, by Technova, a subsidiary of Toyota. At the meeting it was announced that the Japanese trade ministry, MITI, has committed $30 million over a period of four years to support research on what was delicately called "New Hydrogen Energy," including Cold Fusion.

Contrary to appearances, however, this was no normal scientific conference. Cold Fusion is a pariah field, cast out by the scientific establishment. Between Cold Fusion and respectable science there is virtually no communication at all. Cold Fusion papers are almost never published in refereed scientific journals, with the result that those works don't receive the normal critical scrutiny that science requires. On the other hand, because the Cold Fusioners see themselves as a community under siege, there is little internal criticism. Experiments and theories tend to be accepted at face value, for fear of providing even more fuel for external critics, if anyone outside the group is bothering to listen. In these circumstances, crackpots flourish, making matters worse for those who believe that there is serious science going on here.

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The origins of Cold Fusion have been loudly and widely documented in the press and popular literature. Pons and Fleischmann, fearing they were about to be scooped by a competitor named Steven Jones from nearby Brigham Young University, and with the encouragement of their own administration, held a press conference on March 23, 1989, at the University of Utah, to announce what seemed to be the scientific discovery of the century. Nuclear fusion, producing usable amounts of heat, could be induced to take place on a tabletop by electrolyzing heavy water, using electrodes made of palladium and platinum, two precious metals. If so, the world's energy problems were at an end—to say nothing of the fiscal difficulties of the University of Utah. What followed was a kind of feeding frenzy, science by press conference and E-mail, confirmations and disconfirmations, claims and retractions, ugly charges and obfuscation, science gone berserk. For all practical purposes, it ended a mere five weeks after it began, on May 1, 1989, at a dramatic session of The American Physical Society, in Baltimore. Although there were numerous presentations at this session, only two truly counted. Steven Koonin and Nathan Lewis, speaking for himself and Charles Barnes, all three from Caltech, executed between them a perfect blocked shot that cast Cold Fusion right out of the arena of mainstream science.

Before I go any further in telling this tale, I think I'd better come clean about my own prejudices (those of us concerned about the issue of conflicts of interest in academic life refer to this as "disclosure." It's supposed to help protect us from sin). The Caltech protagonists, Steve Koonin, Nate Lewis, and Charlie Barnes, are my faculty colleagues, and I count them all among my personal friends of many years. At the same time, there is a player on the other side of this game who is also one of my oldest personal friends and who is, besides, my long-time scientific collaborator. His story is one that, because it took place outside of the United States, was largely off the radar screen of our journalists and popular authors. Nevertheless, the story is worth telling. It shows at the very least that the frenzy that began in Utah was not an isolated or unique phenomenon.

My friend Professor Francesco Scaramuzzi is the head of a small low-temperature physics research group at a national laboratory in Frascati (a suburb of Rome), Italy, run by an agency called ENEA, roughly analogous to our Department of Energy. It is possible within this agency for a scientist such as my friend Franco to be promoted to the rank of Dirigente (Executive). The promotion would not change in any substantial way his assignment or responsibilities, but it would carry with it very substantial financial rewards and much prestige. Although Franco was certainly one of the laboratory's more distinguished scientists long before Cold Fusion appeared on the scene, he had not been awarded this promotion by 1989, when he was sixty-one years old. The reason is that, in the corrupt Italian

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system that has collapsed only recently, these promotions were based on political affiliation more than scientific accomplishment. For every two Christian Democrats promoted, there would also be a new Socialist, a Communist, and someone from one of the smaller parties among the ranks of the Dirigente. Franco had not been promoted because he refused to join a political party in order to advance his professional career as a scientist. Franco is, in other words, a man of unflinching integrity.

On the morning of April 18, 1989, Franco called to warn me that I would find his picture in the *New York Times* the next day. (I did.) He had just come out of a press conference announcing the discovery of a new kind of Cold Fusion.

Like scientists everywhere, he had heard of the Utah announcement and decided to give it a try. He reasoned that electrolysis wasn't really necessary. It served only to get deuterium (the hydrogen isotope in heavy water) to insert itself into the atomic lattice of the palladium electrode. He also thought it necessary that the system not be in thermodynamic equilibrium. He and his handful of young scientists and technicians arranged to put some titanium shavings in a cell pressurized with deuterium gas (titanium is both cheaper and easier to get hold of than palladium, and, like palladium, it is a metal that absorbs large quantities of hydrogen or deuterium into its atomic crystal lattice). Then they used some liquid nitrogen (a refrigerant readily available in any low-temperature physics laboratory) to run the temperature of the cell up and down, thus creating thermodynamic disequilibrium. The crude apparatus was not suitable for the difficult measurement needed to tell whether any heat was being generated, but fusion should produce neutrons (that is what Steven Jones had claimed to detect at BYU). They got a colleague at the Frascati lab to set up a neutron detector near their apparatus. In the course of their experiments, they often detected nothing at all, but on a couple of occasions, their detector indicated very substantial bursts of neutrons. When the second positive result was discovered on April 17, Franco decided he had to inform the head of his laboratory. In no time at all, he found himself in downtown Rome, talking about it to the head of the entire national agency.

The agency ENEA had been without funding for four months. The necessary legislation was stalled in Parliament. ENEA was borrowing money from banks to meet its payroll. All purchases were frozen. Research was paralyzed. To the politically astute agency head, Scaramuzzi's discovery was an opportunity not to be missed. Franco agreed to a press conference, but only if he could give a full technical seminar to his scientific peers first. The seminar, hastily organized for that same day, was crammed to the rafters with scientists from every laboratory in the Rome area and was even covered by the evening television news programs. At the press conference the next morning, Franco, stunned to find himself flanked by two Ministers of State, did his best to behave with the utmost

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scientific objectivity and reserve, but it made not the slightest bit of difference. The story made headlines all over Italy. Within days, Parliament had approved financing for ENEA and Franco had been promoted to Dirigente. The agency was solvent once more, and Franco's personal salary had increased overnight from one that would be meager for an American post-doc to one that would be generous for a full professor at an American university.

Franco had also become the Italian Prometheus, stealing fire from the Sun. My very reserved, correct, self-effacing friend was a media celebrity, suddenly the most famous scientist in Italy. When I came to visit just a few months later, in the summer of 1989, he handed me two books, each two or three inches thick, of xeroxed copies of his press notices in Italy and abroad. Although it happened far off-stage for most Americans, what happened in Italy had mirrored in many important ways the feeding frenzy in the United States.

For one thing, pecuniary motives had driven science out of the laboratory into the blinding glare of publicity. For another, the story instantly captured the public fancy. Not only were the gallant scientists about to rescue us from the grips of the greedy oil barons (the whole affair took place just shortly after the Exxon Valdez incident), the story was spiced with lots of delicious ironies. In America, mere chemists, spending money out of their own pockets, seemed to have succeeded where arrogant physicists spending hundreds of millions of dollars of public funds had conspicuously failed: they had produced controlled nuclear fusion. The chemists had beaten the physicists, little science had beaten big science, cleverness had prevailed over brute force, two humble professors from Utah had won out over the aristocrats of bicoastal, non-Mormon America. (True, the two Utah professors, Pons and Jones were bitter rivals, Jones, the only Mormon of the bunch, was a physicist, not a chemist, and Pons's partner Fleischmann was not only an Englishman, but a Fellow of the Royal Society. These were mere footnotes, however.)

Much the same was true in Italy. The dire straits of ENEA drove the story out of the lab and into the headlines. Not only had Cold Fusion been reproduced in Italy, but the Italian version was of an entirely new kind. "Fusione Fredda" or Cold Fusion Italian Style was "dry fusion"—that is, without electrolysis. True, Scaramuzzi was also a physicist, not a chemist, but he did small, clever, low-budget science in the Frascati lab, which is better known for its hot fusion and synchrotron-type big science. Suddenly, Italy had more to give the world than sunshine and pasta. An Italian scientific hero now strode the world stage (or so it seemed from inside Italy).

The Cold Fusion story seemed to stand science on its head, not only because it was played out in the popular press without the ritual of peer review, but also because both sides of the debate violated what are gener-

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ally supposed to be the central canons of scientific logic. Science in the twentieth century has been much influenced by the ideas of Karl Popper, the Austrian philosopher. Popper argues that a scientific idea can never be proven true, because no matter how many observations seem to agree with it, it may still be wrong. On the other hand, a single contrary experiment can prove a theory forever false. Therefore, science advances only by demonstrating that theories are false, so that they must be replaced by better ones. The proponents of Cold Fusion took exactly the opposite tack: many experiments, including their own, failed to yield the expected results. These were irrelevant, they argued, incompetently done, or lacking some crucial (perhaps unknown) ingredient needed to make the thing work. Instead, all positive results, the appearance of excess heat, or a few neutrons, proved the phenomenon was real. This anti-Popperian flavor of Cold Fusion played no small role in its downfall, since seasoned experimentalists like Lewis and Barnes refused to believe what they couldn't reproduce in their own laboratories. To them, negative results still mattered.

The anti–Cold Fusion crowd was equally guilty, if you believe another of the solemn canons: In all the high school textbooks, it is said that science must be firmly rooted in experiment or observation, unladen with theoretical preconceptions. On the contrary, however, the failure of Cold Fusion was owing, above all, to the fact that it was an experiment whose result was contrary to prevailing theory.

All parties agreed that, if Cold Fusion occurred in the experiments of Pons and Fleischmann, Jones, Scaramuzzi, and many others, the primary event would have to have been the fusion of the two deuterium nuclei: Deuterium nuclei repel one another because of the electric force between them, but if they get close enough together, they fuse anyway because of what is called the "strong" (nuclear) force. The laws of quantum mechanics allow deuterium nuclei to fuse by accident every so often even if they are not initially close together, but the probability of that happening is very small. Suppose, for example, they are as far apart as the two deuterium nuclei normally are in a deuterium molecule. Then the probability of fusion is much too small to have produced the alleged effects claimed by the Cold Fusioners.

There are two ways to look at just how small the probability is. At the internuclear spacing in the deuterium molecule, the probability is too small by forty or fifty orders of magnitude. Physicists love to throw around such phrases. An order of magnitude means a factor of ten. Too small by forty or fifty orders of magnitude really means too small beyond discussion, beyond imagination, almost beyond meaning. However, that probability is insanely sensitive to how far apart the nuclei are to begin with. To increase the probability by the requisite forty or fifty orders of magnitude requires getting the nuclei closer together by just one order of magnitude. It is

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extremely difficult to imagine how—given the well-known forces involved—they can be gotten closer together by a factor of ten in an experiment on a tabletop. The whole purpose of the hundreds of millions of dollars spent on *hot* fusion is to produce exactly that result. Nevertheless, once we have been anesthetized by talking about forty or fifty orders of magnitude, the idea that a one order of magnitude gap might somehow be overcome is not so hard to swallow.

Still the theoretical difficulties of Cold Fusion don't end with getting the nuclei somehow to fuse. When two deuterium nuclei fuse, they momentarily form the nucleus of the common isotope of helium, called helium-4. When that happens, however, there is so much excess energy in the reaction that the helium-4 almost always breaks up immediately into two smaller pieces. About half the time, a neutron pops out, leaving a helium-3 nucleus. The rest of the time, a proton comes off, leaving a hydrogen-3, also known as tritium, nucleus. It also happens that, one time in a million, the helium-4 doesn't break up at all. Instead, an intact helium-4 nucleus goes zooming off, while emitting a powerful gamma-ray photon. In all cases, the two pieces go off in opposite directions with lots of energy.

What you expect, then, is that about half the fusions will produce energetic neutrons and the other half will leave behind tritium as evidence that they occurred. In fact, as we have already seen, neutrons were detected by Jones, Scaramuzzi, and others, and offered as evidence for Cold Fusion, but there were always far too few of them to account for the amount of heat being claimed by Pons and Fleischmann (the heat would presumably be the end product of the energy carried away by the nuclear fragments of the various reactions that could take place). On the evening of the original Pons and Fleischmann press conference, I ran into one of my buddies at Caltech, a battle-scarred veteran of experimental nuclear physics. "What do you think?" I asked (there was no need to be more specific). "It's bullshit," he said, slipping immediately into the technical jargon so beloved of contemporary scientists. "If it were true, they'd both be dead." What he meant was that if enough fusions had taken place to produce the amount of heat claimed by Pons and Fleischmann, the flux of neutrons that resulted would have long since been enough to send them both to the happy hunting grounds.

To believe that Pons and Fleischmann, Jones and Scaramuzzi, and many others who claimed to observe either heat or neutrons or tritium, were all observing the same phenomenon, one must believe that, when fusion occurs inside a piece of metal, such as palladium or titanium, the outcome is radically different from what is known to happen when fusion occurs in the Sun, or in a hot-fusion plasma, or an atomic bomb, or a nuclear accelerator.

It must be different from conventional nuclear physics. Let's call the

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three possible outcomes of fusion *a*, *b*, and *c*. We'll call *a* the one that emits neutrons, *b* the one that leaves tritium behind, and *c* the one where the helium-4 remains intact. In conventional nuclear physics, fusion results about half the time in *a*, half the time in *b*, and one millionth of the time in *c*. To account for the observations reported, with some consistency, by various researchers in Cold Fusion, fusion inside a metal would nearly always result in reaction *c* (without, however, emitting a gamma ray). One in every hundred thousand or so reactions would result in *b*, and the probability of a reaction *a* would be smaller by yet another factor of a hundred thousand. These are the conditions needed to explain why Cold Fusion cells can generate power at the rate of watts, for periods of days or months, while, far short of killing Pons and Fleischmann, still yield barely detectable traces of neutrons, and only tiny amounts of tritium.

Is it plausible that the nuclear reaction might be altered radically when it takes place among the atoms in a metal, rather than in a rarefied atmosphere? The answer, quite simply, is no. For one thing, the atomic nucleus is so small compared to the distances between atoms in a metal that for all practical purposes, the nucleus is *always* in a near vacuum. For another thing, events occur so quickly in the nuclear fusion reaction that the metal is simply unable to respond. If you like orders of magnitude, the fastest anything can happen in a metallic crystal is nine orders of magnitude slower than the typical time in which the nucleus created by fusing deuterium plays out its drama of fusion and breakup. When the nucleus is doing its thing, the atoms of the crystal are far away and frozen in time. Finally, the energy released in the nuclear reaction is so large that the crystal has no means to absorb it, unless it is spread out instantaneously, over vast distances, by some mechanism not now known (presumably, the same mechanism would have to account for why no gamma ray is emitted). According to everything we know about the behavior of matter and nuclei, Cold Fusion is impossible. This is what I meant when I said that Cold Fusion is an experiment whose result is contrary to prevailing theory.

In spite of all that, scientists are aware that they must be prepared, from time to time, to be surprised by a phenomenon they previously thought to be impossible. There are two recent examples that seem relevant to Cold Fusion. One is called High Temperature Superconductivity, and the other is called the Mössbauer Effect.

In 1986, two Swiss physicists, J. Georg Bednorz and A. Karl Mueller, announced the discovery of a material that remained superconducting at temperatures as high as 30 kelvins. Superconductivity is itself a phenomenon that violates the trained intuition of physicists: at sufficiently low temperature, many metals can conduct electricity without any resistance at all, while simultaneously expelling completely any applied magnetic field. This behavior is so bizarre that it took nearly half a century after its discovery in 1911

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before an acceptable theoretical explanation was formulated. If such weird tricks were going to be played on us, at least they were confined to the privacy of the physics laboratory by the requirement of extreme low temperature. Before Bednorz and Mueller, it was well known that superconductivity could never exist at a temperature higher than about 35 kelvins. After Bednorz and Mueller, it was a matter only of months before materials were discovered that remained superconducting up to 100 kelvins. That's still pretty cold—normal room temperature is about 300 kelvins—but the shocking effect of that discovery on the scientific community is hard to overestimate. The discovery of High Temperature Superconductivity in 1986 set the stage for the announcement—and at least temporary acceptance of the possibility—of Cold Fusion in 1989.

The Mössbauer Effect, discovered thirty years earlier, was another completely unexpected phenomenon that seemed to have an even more direct bearing on Cold Fusion. As we've already seen, Cold Fusion is hard to swallow, in part because it is so implausible to believe that a nuclear reaction might be altered in any meaningful way by taking place in a crystal. Yet the Mössbauer Effect was an example in which precisely this does seem to occur.

When a nucleus has too much energy, it must find some means to get rid of the excess. For example, we've already seen that when two deuteriums fuse, the resulting nucleus, which has far too much energy, can actually break up in any of three ways. In all three cases, however, the result is two fragments that fly off in opposite directions. Mössbauer discovered that, in certain cases when a nucleus in a crystal gives up its excess energy by emitting a gamma ray photon, instead of the photon going one way and the nucleus the other way as would normally be expected, there is a substantial probability that the photon will fly off and the nucleus will stand still. Instead of the nucleus recoiling (just as a rifle does when it fires a bullet), the recoil is taken up by the entire crystal, resulting in essentially no motion at all. The net result is that the gamma ray photon emitted by a nucleus in a crystal can have slightly more energy than the gamma ray photon the same nucleus would have emitted in a vacuum. Our carefully trained intuition, which says that nuclei are unaffected by being in a crystal because they exist in entirely separate realms of distance, time, and energy, has been violated. If our intuition can be violated by the Mössbauer Effect, then why not by Cold Fusion?

That's a good question, and there are very good answers to it. First, the Mössbauer Effect can be observed only for a few special nuclear reactions in which the energy that must be disposed of is much smaller, and the time the nucleus takes to get rid of it much larger than in the Cold Fusion reaction. It occurs precisely in those special cases where our argument, that the nucleus and the crystal act on incompatible scales of time and energy, no

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longer holds true. Second, even then, the Mössbauer Effect does not change the intimate details of the nuclear reaction (such as whether it emits a gamma ray photon) or the probabilities of the various possible ways of giving its excess energy up. It is precisely these details that must be changed if Cold Fusion is to be judged real. Finally, the Mössbauer Effect is in a sense the exact opposite of what is supposed to happen in Cold Fusion: instead of the nuclear recoil energy somehow turning into heat in the atomic lattice, the Mössbauer Effect is interesting precisely because it's the special case in which no heat at all is produced.

In spite of all the differences, many scientists instantly thought of the Mössbauer Effect when they first heard of Cold Fusion. The discovery of the Mössbauer Effect had been unexpected, but once it happened, it was quickly and satisfactorily explained within the framework of conventional theory. It proved that there are still genuine surprises waiting that, once understood, don't violate conventional physical laws. And it also proved that there is at least some realm in which nuclear physics and solid state physics affect each other. Those are just the things you have to be willing to believe in order to be prepared to accept Cold Fusion, at least provisionally.

Immediately after the press conference in Utah, most scientists were willing at least to suspend judgment for a while, to give Cold Fusion a chance. It was precisely during this crucial probationary period (so to speak) that Cold Fusion science went berserk. Many scientists tried their own hand at it. Those that succeeded, or seemed to succeed, held press conferences. Those that failed generally let the matter drop quietly and went on to other things. It would be difficult to devise a worse way of doing science. Among the exceptions to that behavior were Lewis, Barnes, and Koonin of Caltech. They pursued every lead with relentless tenacity and Popperian rigor, repeating every experiment, calculating every effect, looking not merely for positive or negative results, but also for explanations of the false positive results that others were reporting—in other words, finding the mistakes of other scientists. These they found in abundance. Far from publicizing their work, they were so secretive that rumors started to circulate, and even appeared in the press, that they were protecting positive results. Finally, they were able, five weeks after the Utah press conference, to stand before their colleagues in Baltimore and, bit by bit, piece by piece, in fine detail, demolish the case for Cold Fusion. Cold Fusion had been given its chance, a suspension of disbelief no matter how unlikely it seemed, and it had failed to prove itself. In the eyes of respectable science, Cold Fusion was dead.

Meanwhile, back in Frascati, Franco Scaramuzzi and his group of young researchers were not quite prepared to give up. Just as the drama in Italy was little noticed in America, events in Baltimore seemed far away to those in Rome. Franco himself had had, not just fifteen minutes of fame, but a month of it, and it showed no signs of letting up. He was a hero, not only

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to the general public, but also to all his colleagues in the agency ENEA, and ENEA itself had suddenly shed its reputation for bumbling bureaucratic ineptitude. This was not a propitious moment to throw in his hand, just because Lewis, Barnes, and Koonin didn't approve.

Besides, Scaramuzzi had his own data, and he believed in them. Nothing convinces a scientist nearly as effectively as the experience of seeing data emerge from one's own experiment. There were, to be sure, many questions. It turns out that neutrons are not so easy to detect. The instruments used to detect them are sometimes tricky and undependable. In the aftermath of the Frascati announcements, experts from Italy and abroad (especially the U.S.) made brief visits to Scaramuzzi's lab and pronounced their verdicts on how the mistake had been made: the apparent bursts of neutrons were really artifacts because of changes in temperature or humidity, or power surges on the (notoriously unstable) Frascati lab electric system, or other electronic problems. I remember during my visit that summer talking to one of Franco's young colleagues, Antonella De Ninno. "Do they think we're stupid?" she asked me angrily. "Of course we thought of all those possibilities and eliminated them!" Once the group was convinced they had seen the real thing, they weren't about to give up because someone had made a speech in Baltimore.

A bit of wriggle room was available. Pons and Fleischmann did not attend the Baltimore meeting, but Jones did, and he was the first speaker. He pointed out just how small was the effect he claimed to see compared to what Pons and Fleischmann were claiming (as we have seen, the number of neutrons that come out appears to be smaller than expected by about ten orders of magnitude). Thus it seemed possible that even if Cold Fusion didn't produce heat (the Pons-Fleischmann claim), maybe something was going on at a much lower level that produced a few neutrons (as Jones and Scaramuzzi, among others, claimed). Of course, Barnes at Caltech had shown there were no neutrons just as effectively as Lewis had shown there was no heat (and Koonin had shown there was no theory). Furthermore, if Cold Fusion merely produced a few neutrons instead of a lot of heat, it certainly wasn't going to solve the world's energy problems. Nevertheless, it seemed at the time that there just might be two kinds of Cold Fusion: the bad kind (heat) that Koonin and Lewis had put to rest; and the good kind (neutrons) that was still scientifically respectable. The Italian press made much of the fact that "Italian Cold Fusion" was of the good kind, not noticing that the good kind of Cold Fusion, if it existed, would be a scientific curiosity, not an epochal discovery.

After the furor died down, Cold Fusion research continued in a number of places. The key to continued research is financial; to paraphrase California politician Jesse Unruh, money is the mother's milk of scientific research. In the United States, the government funding agencies quickly

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fell into line with scientific orthodoxy and ceased funding anything that smacked of Cold Fusion. However, the industry-supported Electric Power Research Institute decided to put up some funds, just in case. In Japan, Toyota and MITI, apparently willing to accept some short-term risk in exchange for the possibility of a big payoff later, agreed to put up a few yen. In Italy, ENEA, with its budget and prestige resting on Cold Fusion, could hardly refuse to permit Scaramuzzi and his group to press on. In other places, where scientists were given modest financial support and some discretion in how to spend it, some chose to pursue Cold Fusion. In spite of the disapproval of the worldwide scientific establishment, some Cold Fusion research kept right on going.

Scaramuzzi's group did not devote all of its attention to Cold Fusion. At the same time all this was going on, they also developed the world's best device for firing frozen pellets of solid deuterium into the plasma used to create hot fusion. If hot fusion were ever to produce useful energy, this is the means by which the reactor's deuterium fuel would be replenished. They were also responsible for the sophisticated cooling device that rendered it possible to make observations of infra-red cosmic radiation in outer space, using relatively inexpensive long-range balloon flights instead of satellites to rise above most of the Earth's atmosphere. In both these tasks, they were doing successful high technology in the very center of the scientific mainstream.

But they did also continue to pursue Cold Fusion. Reacting to criticism of the primitive technique they had used to detect neutrons, they purchased the best neutron detection system in the world, essentially identical to the one used by Charles Barnes at Caltech. Going one better, they installed it in physics laboratories that had been excavated under a mountain called the Gran Sasso, a two-hour drive from Rome. Anywhere on the surface of the Earth, there are always some neutrons buzzing around owing to cosmic radiation from outer space. This so-called background has to be subtracted from the neutrons produced by any other phenomenon such as Cold Fusion. In the galleries under the Gran Sasso, the shielding effect of the mountain reduces the cosmic ray neutron background nearly to zero. That's why the laboratory was built there. An automated system was set up to monitor the neutron counter while running the temperature of a Scaramuzzi-type deuterium gas cell up and down. Every week or so, a member of the group would have to drive out to the Gran Sasso lab, check out the counters, replenish the supply of liquid nitrogen, and bring back the data. No one could accuse them any longer of being unsophisticated about neutron work. Yet, this experiment, like their own earlier work and many others blossoming around the world, produced positive results, but only sporadically. There was no dependable recipe for coaxing bursts of neutrons out of the Cold Fusion cell. As long as that was true, the world of

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respectable science was not going to pay any attention even to the "good kind" of Cold Fusion.

The Italians then decided to pursue the "bad kind" of Cold Fusion as well. They built a well-designed electrolysis cell, capable of detecting excess heat if any were produced, while obviating some of the shortcomings for which previous excess heat experiments had been criticized. In 1992 and 1993, these experiments, too, gave positive results. The cell would produce very substantial amounts of heat (a few watts) for periods of tens of hours at a time. As in the neutron experiments, these episodes were sporadic, occurring seemingly at random, but at least they occurred only when the fluid in the cell was heavy water (containing deuterium), never when it was light water (containing ordinary hydrogen). The lack of this kind of control experiment had been one of the points of criticism of Pons and Fleischmann. By this time, however, the world of mainstream science was no longer listening.

I went to visit my friend Franco in December 1993, when he returned from the Maui conference. While I was there, he summarized the results of the conference in a seminar presented to the physics faculty at the University of Rome ("La Sapienza," the first university of Rome; now there are two more). This was in itself an unusual event. The physics faculty of the University of Rome today is comparable to the physics department at a good American state university. For them, inviting Franco to speak about Cold Fusion was a daring excursion to the fringes of science. Feeling this was a rare opportunity, Franco prepared his talk with meticulous care.

At the seminar, Franco's demeanor was subdued, and his presentation was, as always, reserved and correct. Nevertheless, his message was an optimistic one for Cold Fusion. In essence (although Franco didn't say it in these words), each of the criticisms that Nathan Lewis had correctly leveled at the experiments of Pons and Fleischmann had been successfully countered by new experiments reported at the conference. Even more important, there was reason to believe that the magic missing factor, the secret ingredient of the recipe that accounted for why Cold Fusion experiments only sporadically gave positive results, might finally have been discovered.

One of the criticisms that Nathan Lewis had used with telling effect is that local hot spots often develop in electrolysis experiments (Lewis is himself an electrochemist and a consummate experimentalist). By placing their thermometer at an accidental hot spot, and by neglecting the elementary precaution of stirring the bath in their cells, Pons and Fleischmann could easily have fooled themselves into thinking there was excess heat where none really existed. To counter this argument, Franco could point to the design of the cell used by his own Frascati group, which carefully averaged the temperature of the entire cell, rather than measuring it at a single

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point (many other groups had introduced mechanical stirrers into their cells).

Another objection that had been raised was that, if heat was generated in these experiments, it was the result of some uninteresting chemical process rather than the result of nuclear fusion. Chemical processes that generate heat are not uncommon in electrolysis experiments. The strongest argument for nuclear fusion (given the near absence of the neutrons and tritium) was that the amount of heat generated was far too large to be due to any chemical process. That would be true, the critics replied, if the chemicals were being generated at the same time as the heat. But all these Cold Fusion cells had long dormant periods during which energy was being pumped in and no excess heat was being produced. The heat finally liberated in the Cold Fusion episodes might just have been chemical energy stored up during the dormant periods. The cells were not producing more energy than was being put into them; they were just storing up energy and releasing it in bursts. Not only would that be much less exciting than a discovery of controlled nuclear fusion, it also wouldn't be of much help in our struggle against the oil barons. Now this argument could be countered as well: there were what appeared to be very careful experiments in which the total amount of energy consumed during the dormant periods was minuscule compared to the amount of heat liberated during the active periods.

Finally, one of the most damaging criticisms of Pons and Fleischmann was that they had failed to do control experiments. Nuclear fusion (if it occurred) should only have been possible (if it were possible) when electrolysis was done in heavy water, made of deuterium. It should not be possible using ordinary water, made of ordinary hydrogen. Now many groups, including Franco's, had done the necessary control experiments and obtained the necessary confirming results (no heat in the controls). Unfortunately, other groups reported that they *did* observe excess heat in experiments done with ordinary light water. Franco dutifully reported these results at the Rome seminar, expressing only muted disapproval ("In my opinion, these results have not been consolidated," he said).

All of this was much less important than the fact that Cold Fusion experiments, if they gave positive results at all, gave them only sporadically and unpredictably. When Bednorz and Mueller announced the discovery of high-temperature superconductivity in 1986, no one carped about control experiments because, once the recipe was known, any competent scientist could make a sample and test it and it would work immediately. If, at their press conference, Pons and Fleischmann had given a dependable recipe for producing excess heat, they very likely would be Nobel Prize winners now (as Bednorz and Mueller are) rather than intellectual outcasts from the community of scientists. The essential key to the return of Cold Fusion to

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scientific respectability is to find the missing ingredient that would make the recipe work every time.

Experiments done in the U.S. and in Japan, which were reported at the Maui meeting, indicate that the missing ingredient may have been found. In all the various Cold Fusion experiments, the first step is to load deuterium into the body of metallic palladium. The issue is how much deuterium gets into the metal. The ratio of the number of atoms of deuterium in the metal to the number of atoms of palladium is called x. It turns out, by means of electrolysis, or by putting the metal in deuterium gas, that it is rather easy to get x up to the range of about 0.6 or 0.7. That is already a startlingly high figure. If there are almost as many deuterium atoms as palladium atoms in the material, the density of deuterium (a form of hydrogen) is essentially equal to that of liquid hydrogen rocket fuel, which can ordinarily exist only at extreme low temperatures. In other words, palladium (and certain other metals including titanium) soak up almost unbelievable amounts of hydrogen or deuterium if given the chance. This is far from a new discovery. However, according to the experiments reported at Maui, x=0.6 or 0.7 is not enough to produce Cold Fusion. Both the American and Japanese groups showed data indicating there is a sharp threshold at x=0.85. Below that value (which can only be reached with great difficulty and under favorable circumstances) excess heat is never observed. But, once x gets above that value, excess heat is essentially always observed, according to the reports presented at Maui and recounted by Franco Scaramuzzi in his seminar at the University of Rome.

The audience at Rome, certainly the senior professors who were present, listened politely, but they did not hear what Franco was saying—that much became clear from the questions that were asked at the end of the seminar and comments that were made afterward. If they went away with any lasting impression at all, it was just the sad realization that so fine a scientist as Franco Scaramuzzi had not yet given up his obsession with Cold Fusion. They cannot be blamed. Any other audience of mainstream scientists would have reacted exactly the same way. If Cold Fusion ever regains the scientific respectability that was squandered in March and April of 1989, it will be the result of a long, difficult battle that has barely begun.

Recently, I told this story in a philosophy course we teach at Caltech called Ethics of Research. When I finished my tale, the first questioner asked whether I believe in Cold Fusion. The answer is no. Certainly, I believe quite firmly the theoretical arguments that say Cold Fusion is impossible. I also believe equally firmly in the integrity and competence of Franco Scaramuzzi and his group of co-workers at Frascati. I was disturbed when I saw that Franco had gotten caught in the web of science-by-news-conference in April 1989 (although I was truly pleased that he finally got the long-overdue recognition his agency ENEA owed him), and I was even more

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distressed when I learned that Franco and his group had observed excess heat (the "bad kind" of Cold Fusion). I have looked at their cells, and looked at their data, and it's all pretty impressive. The Japanese experiment showing that heat nearly always results when x is greater than 0.85 looks even more impressive on paper. It seems a particularly elegant, well-designed experiment, at least to the untutored eye of a physicist. (What do I know about electrochemistry?) What all these experiments really need is critical examination by accomplished rivals intent on proving them wrong. That is part of the normal functioning of science. Unfortunately, in this area, science is not functioning normally. There is nobody out there listening.

John Wain

1925–1993

Contributor, THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR

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I. T. Davis

TRENT BUSCH

Since I have time I will
tell you, Grandfather, that
the house is in decay,
road down, saplings trees.

I say since I have time
because over the years
you've kept me so busy
with the occurrences

of hills and woods, I've had
no life to catch you up.
Laura, the two-day-old
you rested on your knees

the night you died, is all
grown up, as is her brother
whom you never met but has
your eyes and you would like.

They know some of your days,
but mostly not. Grandfather,
you taught me I must climb
in a world where others sat,

and, climbing, to look neither
up nor back, the way maples

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keep a close grip on the earth.
If I have done that, I

owe it to your advice,
yet must repeat the sad
news of your house and the road
you so expertly kept,

and remind you, too, could
you come back, of a story
you often told about
the lumberjacks that you

marveled at when you were
just a boy, how it was
the ones who held on tight
who were the first to fall.

✪ TRENT BUSCH's poems have appeared in many magazines including *Poetry*, the *Hudson Review*, and *Poet & Critic*.

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Slap Shot

(In memory of John Currier)

MATTHEW J. SPIRENG

I'd have thought everyone knows
when a hockey puck is deflected
off the ice, its cold hard rubber
slicing air in your direction,
you duck, dodge, cover up, or
otherwise avoid collision
as best you can. It's why goalies
wear masks, the thickest pads, look like
fat men grown uncharacteristically quick.
But when we watched those minor league teams
at the Civic Center arena
and the goalie deftly deflected
a slap shot so it caromed up
into the high concrete block wall
behind his net (painted a light yellow,
I now recall), and it bounced back off
in our direction, I ducked, Irv
scrambled, but John, the Boston-area native
who'd never seen hockey before,
just watched the puck as it sliced
straight for him, mesmerized by its flight,
perhaps, or believing not one iota
of what he'd been told about taking hold
of one's life, since he was already dying,
though we didn't know, just watched
as the puck hit him squarely in the forehead
and caromed off as someone else's prize
six rows down, and, dazed and bloodied,
watched the rest of the game holding
a cup of ice to the lump on his head,
ready now, he assured us, to
dodge any bullet he could see.

✪ MATTHEW J. SPIRENG is assistant city editor for the Kingston, New York, *Daily Freeman*. His poems have appeared in many journals, including *Poet & Critic*, *Southern Humanities Review*, and *Yankee*.

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A Loss for Words

Plagiarism and Silence

NEAL BOWERS

TRADITIONALLY DEFINED AS A KIND OF ROBBERY, plagiarism is actually an infectious silence. Originating in the plagiarist as inarticulateness, it is spread to others through his appropriation of their work and afflicts writers and scholars at large as elective muteness. Difficult enough to talk about in the abstract, plagiarism renders many people downright speechless when the pathology of a specific case is introduced; and their silence adds chills to the fever of the original infection. With the exception of those few cases that rise to public attention because of the money involved, plagiarism is rarely discussed. Even within the academic world, where plagiarism is supposedly a near-capital offense, plagiarists are routinely allowed to resign in silence and are often launched toward other jobs by letters of recommendation from colleagues who know of but do not mention their activities.

As the victim in a case of plagiarism that I believe is unprecedented for its scope and duration, I have heard the white-noise roar of this silence. For two years, I have fought for my stolen work, but the most difficult struggle has been for my voice. Hearing it used to utter the nothingness of the plagiarist's imagination has been stifling. Having no ready forum within which I could use it to express my anger and feelings of violation has, in some ways, been worse. In effect, the initial theft has been compounded into a much larger loss. Let me attempt to explain.

If plagiarism is a disease of silence, then the treatment for it must surely be language. Operating on this belief, I offer here a victim's story about the manifestations of the disease itself and about how it is regarded by writers and editors. When presented with my case, most

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have done their best to empathize, while others have made it plain that plagiarism barely registers as even a minor infraction on their scale of offenses. Whether concerned or indifferent, however, virtually everyone has left me to face my problems alone, like curious neighbors who pass by a sickroom, look in, and say, "What a shame."

The facts of the case are beyond disputation. My plagiarist has stolen from other poets as well, among them Mark Strand, Sharon Olds, Marcia Hurlow, and probably from still others as yet unidentified; but, for reasons unknown to me, he has specialized in the theft and publication of my work, specifically of two of my poems that he took from *Poetry* magazine. To date, I know of eighteen different literary journals that have published or accepted his plagiarized versions of my two poems. That's why I think of him in a proprietary way, as one sometimes thinks of a chronic illness.

Among the numerous journals in which he has published my work as his own (albeit under a pseudonym, strangely enough) are *Cumberland Poetry Review*, the *Laurel Review*, *Mankato Poetry Review*, and *Poem*. In a few instances, as with *Seneca Review*, *San Jose Studies*, and *Tampa Review*, I intercepted the poems before they went to press by writing to the editors of the journals cited in the plagiarist's published contributor's notes. Still, two years after the first discovery, my poems with his name attached keep turning up.

The plagiarisms are verbatim transcriptions of the originals, with only the titles and first lines substantially altered. To compound the injury, my plagiarist publishes each stolen poem repeatedly, and his variant titles help disguise the multiple publications while preventing detection through reference to indexes or tables of contents. Thus, my poem "Tenth-Year Elegy" becomes "My Careless Father," "My Forgetful Father," "Father's Forgetfulness," and "Someone Forgotten" when plagiarized and published in different magazines.

Compare the opening stanza of my poem "Tenth-Year Elegy," published in the September 1990 issue of *Poetry*, with the first stanza of "Someone Forgotten," published under the name of David Sumner in the November 1991 issue of *Poem*:

Tenth-Year Elegy

Careless man, my father,
always leaving me at rest stops,
coffee shops, some wide spot in the road.
I come out, rubbing my hands on my pants
or levitating two foam cups of coffee,
and can't find him anywhere,
those banged-up fenders gone.

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Someone Forgotten

He is too heavy and careless, my father,
always leaving me at rest-stops, coffee shops,
some wide spot in the road. I come out,
rubbing my hands on my pants or levitating
two foam cups of coffee, and I can't find him
anywhere, that beat-up Ford gone.

The other two stanzas of my poem were appropriated in the same fashion, with only altered line breaks and the occasional substitution or addition of a word to disguise the theft.

He did similar things with my poem "RSVP," which has appeared under the name of David Sumner as "Aspects of Death," "Courtesies," and "The Visitor." Again, compare the opening stanzas:

RSVP

Death observes all the courtesies,
phones long-distance to say
he's dropped in on relatives,
darkly hinting he would like
to visit me.
Playing dumb, I send flowers,
make a small donation
to longevity research.

The Visitor

The sky is shrouded, and death observes
all the courtesies, phones long-distance
to say he's dropped in on relatives,
darkly hinting he would like to visit me.
Playing dumb, I send flowers and make
a small donation to cancer research.

A more obvious case of plagiarism is difficult to imagine, and I felt certain at the outset that I could present the facts to all parties concerned and quickly find some relief. As more and more examples of the plagiarist's handiwork came to light, I grew confident that exposing and stopping him would be easy. I couldn't have been more wrong, because both the plagiarist's intransigence and universal uncertainty about how to deal with the theft of poems have frustrated my attempts.

Although writers and editors recognize plagiarism as an egregious act deserving the worst kind of punishment, there is no established way to enable a victim to seek redress. To whom does one present the

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evidence, and how can the activities of the plagiarist be made known to writers and editors at large? The logical starting point is with journals that have printed stolen work, but after the editors have been notified and have printed editorial statements in later issues, what can be done? This question is especially troubling when dealing with a persistent thief who refuses to quit even after exposure. Letters to the editors of *Poets and Writers* and the *AWP Chronicle* would call attention to the case, but what would such notoriety do to stop someone who seems pathologically determined to continue stealing, to the extent of changing the pseudonym under which he publishes other people's writing?

Even direct warnings to specific editors may not prevent them from publishing stolen work. On March 10, 1992, I wrote to the faculty advisor of *Whiskey Island Magazine* at Cleveland State University, which the plagiarist had listed elsewhere as one of his publication credits, to tell him of the thief. I even enclosed copies of my original poems and the known plagiarisms of them. On April 16, 1992, the editor of that same journal accepted a plagiarized version of my "Tenth-Year Elegy," one identical to a copy I had sent with my warning barely a month before. The plagiarism was published in the magazine's summer issue and came to my attention in July. A similar warning sent to a friend on the editorial board of *Cumberland Poetry Review* also failed, even though I mailed it several months before the plagiarism of "RSVP" was published in that journal.

It is difficult to explain how an editor having a copy of a plagiarism in hand and a specific warning about the criminal activities of the plagiarist can subsequently accept that very plagiarism and publish it. Certainly, editors are overworked and must read more quickly than most would like, but surely any editor ought to slow down long enough to allow evidence of plagiarism to register. Perhaps some editors consider plagiarism so remote a possibility that they dismiss it as a concern. Possibly, some discredit any charge of literary theft. Whatever the reasons for such negligence, its existence argues against the efficacy of the direct warning to editors as a way to stop the plagiarist, no matter how flagrant his offenses.

Apart from the editors directly involved, I relayed the bad news to my friends and colleagues. Most were sympathetic but had no idea what to say. In their voices I heard the pause of reservation. They needed more than a loud assertion; so I copied my two original poems and the plagiarisms and offered up the evidence. Heads wagged, and friends said things like, "Maybe you should feel flattered" and "Imitation is probably a compliment." They wanted to make me feel better, but their remarks tended to trivialize the experience.

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From the beginning, I could see that plagiarism was more than a crime; it was a stigma for the victim. The more I protested the theft of my work, the more I came to be associated with the act of plagiarism. Some editors and poets with whom I corresponded took the plagiarist's side by urging me to "go easy" on him. Some rationalized his actions by saying he probably didn't know what he was doing. One said the plagiarist had actually improved my poem by altering the line breaks at the end, as if plagiarism were just another form of editing or "workshopping." Another suggested that the plagiarist himself might be a kind of victim—of a photographic memory.

Collectively, these apologists identified more closely with my plagiarist than with me, and they seemed occasionally to blame me or to hold me accountable. After all, if the poor guy hadn't read my poems, he would never have been tempted by them. One person, trying to cheer me up, said, "You write too damned well."

Finding such mixed attitudes among friends and associates, I decided that legal assistance might be the answer to my problems. I quickly learned that the absence of money in poetry publication makes lawyers wonder why it matters if a poet's work is stolen. No loss of income, they seem to think, no foul. Moreover, they can't make any significant income themselves from handling such a case, no matter how clear-cut it is.

My lawyer was a specialist who knew how to defend clients against the loss of monetary rights related to patent infringement but seemed incapable of understanding the loss of ownership resulting from the theft of a poem. His reading of the copyright laws convinced him that a crime had occurred, but he had no understanding of my sense of violation and anger. From the beginning, he was dismissive, almost condescending, assuring me he would clear up my problem immediately. Sizing up the plagiarist, he suggested that all we had to do was "just call him and tell him to stop." When that failed, he worked on my case sporadically for the better part of a year, mostly after regular office hours and only when I phoned to ask what was going on. Lacking a strategy, he often asked me what he should do next.

Occasionally, he delivered ultimatums to the plagiarist, whom he located with the help of a private detective, but he was never able to obtain the one thing I wanted—a signed statement acknowledging responsibility for stealing my work and a promise to stop. My lawyer considered suing but discovered the potential defendant lacked sufficient personal wealth to make prosecution worthwhile. Confronted by what my lawyer called a "judgment proof" offender and cost estimates in excess of $10,000 to bring my case to trial, I withdrew and asked for my bill. The tally was $4,100 for a few letters and phone calls that

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amounted to little more than a record of my lawyer's ineffectuality.

Among the few useful documents secured by my attorney is a taped phone conversation in which the plagiarist convinces him he has dialed the wrong number. He does this not by denying his name (his pseudonym, in fact), which he cannot do, having confirmed it upon answering the phone, but by making up a nonexistent street address in a suburb across town and turning the encounter into a case of mistaken identity. He acknowledges that he is David Sumner, but not the one being sought. Having already created a fictitious identity for himself under the name of David Sumner, with a false biography for magazine contributor's notes—born in Ireland and raised in England until age eleven—spontaneously fabricating another version seemed easy for him.

Equally inventive is a letter bearing a Japanese postmark and claiming Japanese residency for the plagiarist, who says his brother phoned him after being contacted by the David Sumner my lawyer allegedly misdialed. The purpose of the letter was to disavow any connection to plagiarized poems and to show that, in any event, he was beyond our reach in Japan. Of course, we later confirmed that the letter was dropped into the Japanese postal system by a confederate living there and that the person who answered the phone and convinced my attorney that he had misdialed was the plagiarist. He is currently pretending to live in Germany, although a recent invitation to read at a Portland, Oregon, bookstore found him conveniently stateside; he turned up to read who knows whose poems.

The lies and evasions were meant to throw us off the trail, and they created enough confusion to slow us down. Even now, I have difficulty unraveling the twisted strands sufficiently to make the story intelligible to anyone unfamiliar with its bizarre dimensions. My attorney was especially susceptible to every false scent; he took everything at face value, and I should have known from the outset that he was overmatched by my plagiarist.

At one point, it seemed we had obtained a major concession: a box containing a list of journals to which my poems had allegedly been mailed and letters to editors in which the plagiarist (using his pseudonym) admitted his wrongdoing and withdrew submissions. A cover letter for the materials claimed they represented complete documentation and that all contributor's copies received as payment had been returned. My attorney regarded this as the culmination of the case, but when I checked with a sampling of the forty-five editors to whom the plagiarist had written, I discovered that none had heard of him before receiving his letter. He had sent confessions only to journals with which he had never transacted any business; and only one of the

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journals actually victimized by him could confirm the return of his contributor's copies.

A final piece of information in the box was a list purportedly containing the names of all journals in which my plagiarized poems had been published. The only titles on the list were those of which we had already indicated knowledge. The others, withheld by us as a control check on the plagiarist's honesty, were not mentioned.

Naturally, the first question everyone asks about this case is "Why?" Why is this person stealing my poems, and doing so repeatedly? Why does he publish them under a pseudonym, thereby depriving himself of any opportunity to take direct credit for them? And why, now that he has been caught, doesn't he simply confess and give up? Without an admission and explanation by the thief himself, a rationale for his acts can only be speculative; but the few comments extracted from him, in letters to my attorney, are of little help. In those letters the thief describes his plagiarisms as an "accident of process," hoping to avoid culpability by implying that he did not intentionally steal my poems. He claims to have obtained them in a poetry workshop, where the instructor handed out copies of published poems, with the authors' names removed, as part of a class exercise, and that he came to believe he had written them. (In the words of my plagiarist, "I took them to be my own.") This is the timeless excuse given by the freshman student, who, caught plagiarizing, insists that he copied the stolen work into a notebook and forgot it wasn't his original composition.

My plagiarist's "accident of process" is more sustained, however, having continued a full year after he was first confronted with his thefts. While he has expressed remorse, referring to himself in an insincere letter of apology as "an ugliness," he has demonstrated no intention of stopping his activities. In fact, he has adopted Diane Compton as the latest name he attaches to stolen work. Poems attributed to her *and* to David Sumner can be found in the Spring/Summer 1992 issue of *Whiskey Island Magazine* (one of them yet another plagiarism of my "Tenth-Year Elegy"). At a slightly faster rate of mutation, my plagiarist could conceivably fill an entire issue with his false names and stolen poems.

The plagiarist's explanation for his thefts is doubly offensive to me because one of the poems he has stolen and published as his own was written by me in the tenth year following my father's death. It is a highly autobiographical poem about grief and longing, and it is offensive in the extreme to have someone suggest that he thought he had written it. Emotions, autobiographical details, and a significant portion of my life were appropriated; and it is impossible to believe that someone could confuse his own history with mine.

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The possibility that my plagiarist is mentally or emotionally ill is very real. A friend of mine who is a practicing psychologist says my plagiarist suffers from feelings of inadequacy. He wants to be a poet but cannot make it on his own abilities, so he has attached himself to me. His attraction to my work may have been random, or it may be the expression of some psychic affinity. This latter hypothesis is especially disconcerting, for it makes me feel like the object of a stalker. My uneasiness in this regard was heightened when my wife received an unsigned letter stating, "I am the person who presented two of your husband's poems to literary journal editors as my own." He appealed to her for understanding, since "women are more forgiving and empathetic than men" because "most men are driven by vengeance." His unsettling letter was a final breach of our privacy, perhaps of our security as well. Even the fact that he knew my wife's first name was appalling.

My plagiarist probably felt that his anonymous confession of guilt could not be used against him, but he has signed his name everywhere to his intent. His verbatim copying is clearly no "accident of process," because it involves many poems and is ongoing. Moreover, his elaborate evasions and attempts to hide plainly reveal an awareness of what he is doing. Still, many writers and editors are unable to hold him accountable for his acts, even though he abused their trust. One editor, after being informed that she had accepted one of my plagiarized poems for publication, defended the plagiarist by saying, "Everyone is guilty of something." Would she offer the same communal absolution for a burglar or rapist?

True, plagiarism is not the same as burglary, although the sense of invasion is similar, nor is it equivalent to rape, even though the victim of plagiarism is initially regarded with suspicion and sometimes blamed for bringing the theft on himself. The broken world is filled with horrors, and plagiarism seems a very small crime in the context of terrorism and genocide. This, too, may cause some writers to dismiss plagiarism with a shrug.

A few editors victimized by the pseudonymous David Sumner have offered no commiseration; one editor even responded by sending me a packet of post cards containing her own poems but gave no indication that she felt the least bit unhappy about having been deceived. For her, our correspondence (her part of it a brief, lighthearted note scrawled on the bottom of my original letter) was little more than an occasion for self-promotion and networking. That these things were to her more important than addressing the crime at hand suggests that she didn't regard literary theft with anything approaching my sense of indignation.

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As angry as I still am, however, I confess that after two years of thinking and talking about being the victim of a chronic plagiarist, I sometimes wonder if I shouldn't have simply let the matter drop. In the end, my efforts to obtain justice have yielded few results; and I am not materially worse off than I was before my work started appearing under someone else's name. In fact, my only financial loss, ironically, has been my attorney's legal fees. Although every time I publish a poem I fear I am creating more opportunities for my plagiarist, I can endure my frustrations in the privacy of my own home, which has not been physically violated. Everything in my house is exactly where it was before, including the stolen poems, which can be pulled from the shelf and read in the pages of *Poetry*, where I originally published them, or found in manuscript form in a file folder labeled "Rough Drafts." As someone said to me early in my pursuit of justice, what I've had taken is "only poetry."

Had my VCR been stolen in the middle of the night, I would have clearer status as a victim of crime and would benefit from the full force of the law. Sometimes, I consider what it means to live in a society that values electronic equipment more than creative work. Then, almost immediately, the intangible nature of language begins to haunt me, and I wonder how it's possible for anyone to own words. Exactly what have I been deprived of? No dark rectangles on the walls show where my poems once hung. Is it mere arrogance on my part that makes me insist on justice? And what would be a just outcome? How can I be compensated for the theft of poems that originally earned me two dollars a line and from which the plagiarist himself probably never made a nickel? To the degree that he has muddled the issue of authorship for future readers, how will any admission or contrition on his part set the printed record straight? Certainly, there is no way to restore the hours and weeks given over to this business, especially by my wife, who postponed her own work to create and maintain a comprehensive documentation of my plagiarist's activities.

These uncertainties pursue me even as I pursue my plagiarist, alone, wondering why I bother when so few others seem to give a damn. To my knowledge, only three editors of the eighteen who accepted or published poems stolen from me wrote directly to the thief demanding that he account for his deeds. None took legal action or offered to join me in legal pursuit. Even in my plagiarist's hometown of Portland, Oregon, members of literary organizations who have themselves been victimized by my plagiarist's publications in local journals refuse to return my phone calls or answer my letters. Their silence is especially strange considering that they contacted me and offered to help in whatever ways they could to stop this person

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who lives among them. Their early indignation changed into caution and then into the belief that this is my problem alone.

Obviously, my plagiarist has been a particular agony in my life, but my aches and fevers are only a localized manifestation of his virulence. If nothing else, he destroys trust. No editor abused by a plagiarist can ever look at submissions the same way. I know I can't. When poems arrive for *Poet & Critic*, the literary magazine I edit (and to which my logbook shows my plagiarist has submitted poems), I wonder if works I like by authors unknown to me are perhaps too good, if they may not, in fact, be someone else's. And, of course, no poet can be sure that his or her work won't be stolen. Nagged by uncertainties, we can no longer simply sit down as writers and editors and engage the language; we must first overcome our apprehensions.

While my plagiarist seems to be a mutation, a would-be writer gone terribly wrong, he manifests the primary trait of most contemporary poets—the urge to publish. In an environment in which poets keep a running tabulation of the number of items in their bibliographies, quality is regularly sacrificed to quantity. Publishing, not writing well, has become the poet's top priority; and the pseudonymous Mr. Sumner has merely taken the next logical step—publishing and not writing at all. Of course, the plagiarist is responsible for his own actions, but he acts within and is influenced by his cultural context. To what extent general attitudes about writing and publishing helped to create my plagiarist is an issue for debate, but there can be no doubt that we provided a medium within which he flourishes.

A sustained noise becomes a kind of silence, something the brain eventually tunes out to preserve itself. So it is with the thousands of poetry publications and hoards of would-be poets in this country. Collectively, they make a great din, which no one can possibly listen to with seriousness and discernment. Drawn to this empty hum by natural affinity, my plagiarist found a home. His muse is mute, but he can stand in the throng and mouth someone else's words because hardly anyone is listening anyway.

Since 1990 my plagiarist has published sixty poems in thirty-seven different journals. The voice and style vary so widely that they cannot possibly belong to one person, and yet no other poets have stepped forward to cry foul. Two conclusions can be drawn from their silence: either the thefts have not been discovered or the poets involved do not consider their work worth defending. Either way, poetry as a result seems a cheapened commodity, and I am reminded of the consolation offered to me by one of my friends, "You can always write another poem."

At this moment, thousands of people across America are doing just

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that, writing another poem, most of them thinking of it already as another publication, another number to tally. Out there somewhere, also, is my plagiarist, their kindred spirit, a man with nothing to say. Together, they are engendering silence, teaching us how not to listen, how to turn away with a shrug, wordless. Against this emptiness, a few persist in the belief that words are our most precious possession. We construct our days and our lives with language. We approach the world through our utterances and know that world to be real. Now and then, its mystery provokes a poem, a shaping effort. Who steals such words steals breath and pulse and consciousness, leaving a silence that must be overcome.

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Lily of the Valley

CHRISTINE WHITTEMORE

I told my daughter they
were lilies of the valley;
she said it after me: *the lily*
of the valley.

That's a lovely word, she said,
and then I picked a few
showing her the whiteness
of the small bells.

That's a lovely word, she said
the lily of the valley;
at four years old
she hears our sayings freshly.

The flowers hang and shiver,
clear notes on a stave descending;
the curling petal points
precise as infant toes.

I look at the lily
of the valley,
and at my daughter:

all words fall silent.
Syllables can't sound
that clarity.

✪ CHRISTINE WHITTEMORE's poems and essays have appeared in the *Plains Poetry Journal, Hellas,* the *Christian Science Monitor,* and *Parabola.*

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Billy Blake's Trial

BRIAN DOYLE

A COLD JANUARY DAY, CHICHESTER, ENGLAND. A "fitfully wet day" along the English coast, according to the *Sussex Weekly Advertiser.* Midmorning—a melancholy time, too early for lunch, too early for whiskey, breakfast a fond memory. In the Chichester Guildhall a man named Youatt, a minister, strolls into a courtroom. He is a court recorder, charged with the shorthand accounting of trial proceedings. The room in which he found himself was probably made almost entirely of wood: wooden benches, wooden railings, a wooden witness-box adjacent to the wooden magistrate's seat, wooden floor, sometimes a wooden judge. There were probably two oil paintings to either side of the magistrate's seat. One was almost certainly of the king—George III at the time. The other was usually of a national hero of some sort; let us say it is a portrait of the genius poet John Milton, a man who looked like a cart horse. Both paintings were probably enormous, as huge paintings were then considered dashing. No other ornaments are visible in the room, although there were almost certainly mountains of loose papers on the two counselors' tables.

Nothing happens to the Reverend Mister Youatt in his wooden room for a good long while. In a sense this stultifying pause is very English. Nothing happens for long stretches in England. It is the English way—white bread, thin tea, a land of hedgerows and gardens, amid which the people dream of order and porter. A slow land, a dreamy land. On this day, however, in about fifteen minutes, Mr. William Blake, age forty-seven, a resident of nearby Felpham for three years, will be tried for sedition against George III, King of England, said treasonous acts being assault and battery on the person of Private John Scolfield of the Royal Dragoon Guards, and dragging the Priv-ate down the street by his collar, and stuffing the Private bodily into his barracks, and the vehement utterance of many seditious expressions, viz: "Damn the King," "You Soldiers are all Slaves," and "If Bonaparte should come he would be master of Europe in an

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Hour's Time," and so forth. The case, *Rex v. Blake,* will be tried before a jury, six magistrates, and the Duke of Richmond. Counsel for the defense, Mr. Samuel Rose. First witness for the prosecution, Private John Cock of the Royal Dragoon Guards. Witnesses for the defense, various.

> Now is my grief at worst, incapable of being
> Surpassed; but every moment it accumulates more & more,
> It continues accumulating to eternity; the joys of God advance,
> But my griefs advance also, for ever & ever without end.
> O that I could cease to be! Despair! I am Despair,
> Created to be the great example of horror & agony; also my
> Prayer is vain. I called for compassion; compassion mock'd;
> Mercy & pity threw the grave stone over me, & with lead
> And iron bound it over me for ever.

Blake was nervous about the trial, damned nervous. It had already cost him a hundred pounds simply for bail—money he had to borrow from friends—and the prospect of losing the case was terrifying. England had declared war on Napoleon in May, the country was an unruly bundle of nerves, and rumors of French invasion were rife along the southern coast. It was also rumored that Napoleon had assembled fleets of flatboats in every creek and harbor on the Channel; to fend off these invaders, troops of dragoons had been quartered in various coastal towns. Thus came Scolfield's troop to Felpham. Under these circumstances, few accusations could be more serious than that of sedition, and the fact that Scolfield was a soldier boded ill.

Adding to the actual physical danger of Blake's position was its inconvenient timing. Blake and his wife, Catherine, had spent this last year in Felpham itching to leave. They were ready to move back to London in September when Scolfield filed charges in August. Felpham, which Blake had hoped would be "a sweet place for Study," had been a bust: Catherine was constantly sick, his neighbor William Hayley badgered him incessantly, and the weather was unrelentingly, angrily, eternally gray. London, which he had fled cursing its filth and meanness, now looked delicious. "I can carry on my visionary studies in London unannoy'd," he wrote to his London friend Thomas Butts. "There I can converse with my friends in Eternity, See Visions, Dream Dreams & prophecy & speak Parables unobserv'd & at liberty from the Doubts of other Mortals. I assure you that, if I could have return'd to London a Month after my arrival here, I should have done so, but I was commanded by my Spiritual friends to bear all, to be silent, & to go through all without murmuring."

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What is the price of Experience? do men buy it for a song?
Or wisdom for a dance in the street? No, it is bought with the price
Of all that a man hath, his house, his wife, his children.
Wisdom is sold in the desolate market where none come to buy,
And in the wither'd field where the farmer plows for bread in vain.

In Felpham, Blake had hired a man named William to tend to his garden. The man was a hostler, or horse groom, at the nearby Fox Inn. On the morning of August 12, Blake emerged from his cottage to find two men in his garden. One was William; the other was Private Scolfield, who, unbeknownst to Blake, had been invited into the garden by the gardener. In a letter to Butts, Blake explained:

I desired [Scolfield], as politely as was possible, to go out of the Garden. He made me an impertinent answer. I insisted on his leaving the garden; he refused. I still persisted in desiring his departure; he then threaten'd to knock out my Eyes, with many abominable imprecations & with some contempt for my Person; it affronted my foolish pride. I therefore took him by the Elbows & pushed him before me until I had got him out; there I had intended to have left him, but he, turning about, put himself into a Posture of Defiance, threatening & swearing at me. I, perhaps foolishly & perhaps not, stepped out at the Gate, &, putting aside his blows, took him again by the Elbows, &, keeping his back to me, pushed him forward down the road about fifty yards—he all the while endeavouring to turn round & strike me, & raging & cursing, which drew out several neighbours; at length, when I had got him to where he was Quarter'd, which was very quickly done, we were met at the Gate by the Master of The Fox Inn (who is the proprietor of my Cottage), & his wife & Daughter & the Man's Comrade & several other people. My Landlord compell'd the Soldiers to go indoors, after many abusive threats against me & my wife from the two soldiers; but not one word of threat on account of Sedition was utter'd at that time.

And then the Knave begins to snarl
And the Hypocrite to howl
And all his good Friends shew their private ends
And the Eagle is known from the Owl

Three days later Private Scolfield swore out a formal complaint of sedition by the "Miniature Painter" William Blake against the king. Scolfield's account had Blake delivering a lengthy and bloodthirsty speech during which he shouted that he would cut the throats of his fellow Englishmen at Bonaparte's command, among other savageries. Scolfield also swore that Mrs. Blake issued forth from the cottage like a Fury and shouted that "altho' she was but a Woman, she would fight for Bonaparte as long as she had a drop of blood in her." Scolfield's account ends with Mrs. Blake telling her "said Husband" to eject the soldier, with Blake seizing the peaceful Scolfield by the

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collar, and with Blake damning the king as loudly at the top of his voice.

> Cold snows drifted around him:
> Ice cover'd his loins around.

The matter went to a grand jury in October 1803 at the Michaelmas Quarter Sessions in nearby Petworth. Blake attended, accompanied by his gardener. To Blake's dismay, the jury found Scolfield's charges of sedition and assault worthy of trial—the "bills were true," in the phrase of the day—which meant that he would be formally tried before a judge and jury in January. It was Blake's right, as defendant, to provide the court with his account of the matter, if he so chose, and to list points of evidence that he or his lawyer would muster in his defense. Blake did so, in a businesslike memorandum titled "In Refutation of the Information and Complaint of John Scolfield, a private Soldier, Etc." The memo ends with this editorial flourish:

> If such Perjury as this can take effect, any Villain in [the] future may come and drag me and my Wife out of our House, and beat us in the Garden or use us as he please or is able, and afterwards go and swear our lives away. Is it not in the Power of any Thief who enters a Man's Dwelling and robs him, or misuses his Wife or Children, to go and swear as this Man has sworn?

> Los seized his Hammer & Tongs;
> he laboured at his resolute Anvil
> Among indefinite Druid rocks & snows of doubt & reasoning.
> Enraged & stifled without & within,
> in terror & woe, he threw his
> Right Arm to the north, his left Arm to the south, & his Feet
> Stamped the nether Abyss in trembling & howling & dismay.

Enter, with a hacking cough, Mr. Samuel Rose. He is a thin and sickly man about thirty years old, a friend of both Hayley and the poet William Cowper. Hayley, who has already shelled out for most of Blake's bail, hires Rose to defend Blake at Chichester Sessions.

The prosecution argued first, as is the custom to this day in English (and American) law, and after statement of the charge by Private Scolfield and corroborating testimony by Private Cock, Scolfield's lawyer hammered away at the "atrocity & malignity" of the charge, figuring that if the jury could be awed by the seditious imprecations that had supposedly issued from Blake's mouth, they would ignore the fact that the only eyewitness, the hostler, was prepared to swear that Blake said nothing of the kind. This tactic, called prosecuting the crime, sometimes works with serious charges, since juries are anxious

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to assign blame for such crimes; the more serious the offense, the more likely they are to convict someone.

Counselor Rose tooled his defense accordingly. His speech, "taken in short Hand by the Revd. Mr. Youatt," opens with a complete agreement that such an offense is atrocious and malignant beyond words: "If there be a man who can be found guilty of such a transgression, he must apply to some other person to defend him," says Rose, icily. "*I* certainly think that such an offence is incapable of extenuation. My task is to shew that my client is not guilty of the words imputed to him; it is not to shew that [those words] are capable of any mitigated sense."

Having distanced himself and his client from the deviltry of the charge, Rose methodically sets out the pieces of his argument like chessmen. One, Blake has been a loyal subject of the king for all of his forty-seven years. Two, Blake is a friend of the local hero and noted patriot Hayley, who would never have allowed a rebel into his house. Three, Blake is an artist, and therefore apolitical. ("His art has a tendency, like all the other fine arts, to soften every asperity of feeling & of character, & to secure the bosom from the influence of those tumultuous & discordant passions, which destroy the happiness of mankind.") Four, Scolfield is an undependable witness—he has been broken from sergeant to private on account of drunkenness. Five, the charge prima facie doesn't make sense—is Blake, a sensitive artist, likely to storm from his house to utter "malignant and unintelligible discourse to those who are most likely to injure him for it"? Six, the hostler, who saw and heard the whole row, denies the charge wholly. Seven, the testimony of Private Cock, who stated that he emerged from his barracks to hear Blake damning the king, country, and soldiers, is contradicted by a woman named Mrs. Grinder, who was next to Cock by the door of the barracks, and who says the poet said nothing of the kind.

"I will call my witnesses [the hostler and Mrs. Grinder] & you shall hear their account," sums up Rose. "You will then agree with me that they totally overthrow the testimony of these Soldiers."

At this point, shockingly, Rose collapsed, overcome with the tension and with the effects of a nervous disease that would kill him a few months later. The court was in an uproar for several minutes.

> Lightnings of discontent broke on all sides round
> And murmurs of thunder rolling heavy long & loud
> over the mountains

Rose was helped to his feet but could not carry on, and because there was suddenly no defense lawyer, the defense witnesses were not

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called. The chairman of the Bench of Magistrates, the Duke of Richmond (who, according to Hayley, disliked Blake intensely and was for political reasons itching to convict him), sent the jury off to its deliberations, and the packed house settled back to wait for a verdict.

It could not have been much later than two o'clock in the afternoon when the jury retired; the trial had begun at ten that morning, only the two soldiers had testified, and there had been only one full-length summation, that by the prosecution. If we generously allow half an hour for Rose's suddenly aborted speech (it is 1,650 words in Youatt's account) and guess that there was a lunch break, or an adjournment of some kind, or that Blake's repeated shouting of "False!" during Scolfield's testimony (a boy at the trial later told the journalist Alexander Gilchrist that what he remembered best from that day was Blake's "flashing eye") held up matters, or that attending to the fallen Rose may have taken a while, we may have pushed the clock to three o'clock or so. But the jury did not return its verdict until nearly eight o'clock that evening.

So Blake sat there in the courtroom at the Guildhall, on a dank day, his lawyer silenced, his wife sick at home, his freedom and future in the hands of people he did not know, in a county he had been itching to leave for years, for *five hours.*

> How long will ye vex my soul,
> And break me in pieces with words?

If this essay were a movie, there would be a natural break at this point; the camera would pan around Blake sitting there at the table, his eyes flashing, the murmuring crowd staring at him, the Duke of Richmond glaring from the bench, Scolfield glaring from the prosecution's table, Rose wheezing in a corner, Hayley up in the balcony signing autographs, the Reverend Mr. Youatt leaning back in his chair, exhausted. Perhaps the camera would zoom in on Blake's round face ("He had a broad pale face and a large full eye," wrote the memoirist Crabb Robinson), always keying on his eyes, using the ferocious glare in them as an anchor for the frame. His eyes were gray and slightly protuberant, an effect heightened by his receding hairline. He had a firm chin, a considerable nose, and the look of a furious hawk when he was angry. The camera sidles up to Blake's face, the hubbub in the room gets a little louder, Blake turns slightly to stare *right into the camera,* his glaring eye filling the frame.

The camera here does a fade-and-flip so fast it barely registers on the viewer, and now it is retreating from the same ferocious eye, but the eye is in the face of four-year-old Billy Blake, second son of James Blake, hosier and haberdasher, and we are into the flashback scene,

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which will cover, in a series of crosscut jumps, the forty-three years between 1761, when Blake, age four, saw God, "who put His head in the window and set him a-screaming," according to his wife, and 1804, when Blake is the quiet eye of a swirling hubbub in Chichester's Guildhall.

At age eight Blake reported to his mother that he had seen the prophet Ezekiel under a tree. His mother beat him. At age ten he reported that he had seen a tree filled with angels, their "bright angelic wings bespangling every bough like stars." His father beat him. A month later, as he stood at the edge of a field watching haymakers at work, he saw angels walking toward him through the rye. His parents stopped beating him and sent him to art school, a decision made easier because the boy was a "booby" who spent all his time in his father's haberdashery drawing on the backs of bills. At age fourteen he became an engraver; at age twenty-four he married a slim, dark-eyed girl named Catherine, who calmed him by cupping his feet in her hands when he shook with visions.

For the next twenty-three years, Blake drew, painted, engraved, printed, colored, stippled, and lithographed. He opened a print shop that immediately failed. He invented a new form of engraving after he had a dream in which his dead brother Robert explained it to him. He wrote songs and then simple poems and then vast books of complex poems, many of which he engraved and printed himself, in volumes that he and Catherine painted and bound by hand. They lived on Green Street, Broad Street, Poland Street, the Hercules Buildings, Felpham, South Molton Street, and in the Strand. He sometimes made money and sometimes did not. Mostly he did not. To earn a living he did engravings on commission and drawings and watercolors for books and magazines; meanwhile, at night, at dawn, and often when he was supposed to be working on commissions, he wrote his huge poems and engraved them onto copper plates and printed them and watercolored the sheets and bound them into books, which he offered for sale at outrageous prices.

Here are the names of some of his books: *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, The Book of Los, The Everlasting Gospel, The Book of Thel, The Book of Urizen, The Song of Los, The Four Zoas, Songs of Innocence and of Experience shewing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul, Milton,* and *Jerusalem.* These last two were among his last works, and both were begun at Felpham, before the trial. It is quite possible that Blake was writing *Milton* on the morning of August 12, when he walked out into his garden and noticed Private John Scolfield, of His Majesty's Royal Dragoons, standing at the garden gate, with a sneer upon his face.

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If you account it Wisdom when you are angry to be silent and
Not to shew it, I do not account that Wisdom, but Folly.
Every Man's Wisdom is peculiar to his own Individuality.

Between three o'clock, when the jury retired, and eight o'clock, when the foreman stood to announce the verdict, Blake probably remained seated. Possibly he read, drew, or painted. He apparently had an astonishing capacity for concentration, and often he spent eight hours at a time writing or drawing. It may be in this case that he simply sat there in the room thinking. There were no rules then, as there are none now, about activity during intermissions in trials; while the jury is deliberating, the accused, if he or she is not physically restrained, may stand on his head, imitate a cricket, mutter poems, or stare abstractly into space. But this interregnum ends at the moment that the jury files back into the courtroom and the foreman stands, and William Blake stands and stretches himself to his full height (about five feet five inches) and waits to hear whether he is a free man or whether he will be deported to Australia or hung by the neck until he is dead.

Every Night and every Morn
Some to Misery are Born.
Every Morn and every Night
Some are Born to sweet delight.
Some are Born to sweet delight,
Some are Born to Endless Night.

The courtroom hushes; Blake's eyes are nearly popping out of his head as the foreman forms the words—

Not—and then with a rush as the crowd begins to roar—*Guilty*—and the courtroom explodes.

"In defiance of all decency," the *Sussex Weekly Advertiser* reported, the court was "thrown into an uproar by noisy exultations," and Blake was rushed out of the Guildhall in a roaring tide of townspeople. Hayley, ecstatic at the verdict, paused to drip some sarcasm on the judge, who he thought was "bitterly prejudiced" against Blake: "I congratulate your Grace," said Hayley unctuously, "that after having been wearied by the condemnation of sorry Vagrants, you have at last had the gratification of seeing an honest man honorably delivered from an infamous persecution. Mr. Blake is a pacific, industrious, & deserving artist."

"I Know nothing of Him," snapped the Duke.

"True, my Lord, your Grace can know Nothing of Him," said Hayley, driving home the lance; "& I have therefore given you this

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Information: I wish your Grace a good Night." And off he went with Blake to dinner at the home of a mutual friend, Mrs. Poole.

I think about that dinner once in a while—what they ate, what Blake thought, who got drunk. Probably Hayley pontificated, for he did that well, and he had, after all, paid Blake's legal fees. I suppose Mrs. Poole smiled happily on her friend Blake, released from the shadow of the noose. And Billy Blake, Billy Blake—did he drink too much? Was he merry? Or did he sit there like a rock in a stream and think about his darling Kate, sick in bed in their new flat in London, and, in his mind, take her in his arms and tell her, Kate, we are free, free, free, Kate, free, and the world will never again bind us and we will forge ahead and make our art and start over and earn our bread and worship the Lord and be free free free free free?

> A Robin Red breast in a Cage
> Puts all Heaven in a Rage.
> A dove house fill'd with doves & Pigeons
> Shudders Hell through all its regions.

William Blake, poet and printer, disappears almost completely from the public record after his trial. From 1804 through 1809, he scrambled without much success to make a decent living as an engraver. In 1809 he held a one-man show of his paintings at his brother's house. The show failed miserably, and its only reviewer, Robert Hunt of the *Examiner* magazine, called Blake "an unfortunate lunatic." In 1812 he exhibited four paintings at the Water Colour Society. In 1816 he was listed in *A Biographical Dictionary of the Living Authours of Great Britain and Ireland*, although the entry made him out to be an eccentric. From 1808 to 1819, Blake sold perhaps a couple of dozen engravings per year. He told an art dealer that he and Catherine made do for many years on an income of about a guinea a week—the equivalent today of a couple living for seven days on about twenty dollars. He kept working, though—"I never Stop," he told one friend—and the years slipped by until, in 1827, he was suddenly seventy years old, "being only bones & sinews, All strings & bobbins like a Weaver's Loom."

> Trembling I sit day and night, my friends are astonished at me,
> Yet they forgive my wanderings. I rest not from my great task!

I have been writing this essay about Blake's trial for more than a year now. I have been taking notes for it for five years. Over the course of those years I have asked myself, many times, why I'm doing this. A

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careful account of the trial for sedition of the poet and printer William Blake, in the year 1804, on a fitfully wet day in January, in a wooden room by the sea—Why?

Because this essay is my way of befriending and comprehending Billy Blake, whom I greatly admire in absentia.

Why do I admire Blake so?

Because he told the truth, because he shoved an insolent leering soldier down the road and stuffed him through a doorway, because he saw angels and saints and talked openly about his visions. Because he published his work himself. Because he was a tender and difficult and solicitous friend. Because he took great pride in his engraving and worked endlessly on plates to make them perfect. Because, when he knew he was going to die, he lay in his bed singing softly. Because he smiled at the deft poetry of the message when his wife served him an empty plate at dinner to remind him that they were starving. Because he wasn't satisfied with extant mythology and so built a vast, grand impenetrable one of his own. Because in all the things he wrote he never mentioned his weight, which was ample, or his height, which was not. Because he single-handedly rescued the ampersand from oblivion. Because, in the few drawings of him, he is alert, intent, *attentive.* Because, even though he claimed much of his work was dictated whole to him by angels and prophets, he edited heavily. Because he and his wife used to sit naked in their garden and recite passages from *Paradise Lost.* Because, when he was asked to recite his poems at parties, he got up and removed his coat and sang his lyrics aloud while dancing around the room, which is why he was subsequently not invited to parties anymore. Because he taught his wife, a grocer's daughter, to read. Because he rose first every morning and laid the fire and made tea for her. Because he was endlessly exuberant. Because once at a dinner party he suddenly said to the child next to him, "May God make this world as beautiful to you as it has been to me," a sentence she remembered the rest of her life. Because he held his opinions firmly. Because his wife said she never saw his hands still unless he was asleep. Because to walk with him "was like walking on air and talking with the Prophet Isaiah," said his young friend George Richmond (no relation to the Duke). Because he took great care to leave no debt at his death. Because he wrote and then threw away "six or seven epic poems as long as Homer, and twenty tragedies as long as Macbeth," judging them not worthy of publication or engraving. Because in the ringing fury of his lines there is also great mercy. Because, even when he was sick unto death, he engraved a little business card for his old friend George Cumberland. Because he could not stop painting and died with his pencil in his hand. Because he bought

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a new pencil two days before he died. Because the very last thing he drew was his wife's face.

It is this last detail that catches my heart.

> But thou O Lord
> Do with me as thou wilt!
> for I am nothing,
> and vanity.

I have scoured many books for accounts of Blake's last day. I'm not sure why. We all die, in the end, and the grace or gracelessness with which we leave is meat only for the morbid. Yet I want to know how Billy Blake stepped into the next room. I want to know how firmly he held his opinions in the face of annihilation. I want to hear his heart. I want to know *him* in the last moments that he wore a body like mine, in the last moments that he saw crows, spoons, apples, angels.

He died on a Sunday in late summer. By this time he was completely bedridden, "his ankles frightfully swelled, his chest disordered, old age striding on," noted a friend. Blake himself knew that he had not long to live. "Dear Cumberland," he had scribbled in April, "I have been very near the Gates of Death & have returned very weak & an Old Man feeble & tottering, but not in Spirit & Life, not in The Real Man, The Imagination, which Liveth for Ever. In that I am stronger & stronger as this Foolish Body decays."

On the morning of August 12—exactly twenty-three years, to the day, after he met Private John Scolfield, of His Majesty's Royal Dragoons—Blake awoke early and painted for a couple of hours. Then, according to his wife, he said "I have done all I can," and he dropped the painting on the floor. She sat down at his bedside.

"Kate, stay as you are. You have been an angel to me, I will draw you," he said. When the drawing was finished, he signed it "Mrs. Blake drawn by Blake" and wrote her name in large letters under his signature.

Then he began to sing. He sang "Hallelujahs & songs of joy & triumph, with true exstatic energy," for the rest of the afternoon—hymns and then, for hours, his own poems. At about six o'clock, he told Catherine that he was going to that country that all his life he had wished to see, and that he would always be about her.

"Then," wrote his friend George Richmond, who was at his bedside, "his Countenance became fair, His eyes Brighten'd, and He burst out Singing of the things he saw in Heaven," and he died.

> Have pity upon me, have pity upon me,
> O ye my friends;
> For the hand of God hath touched me.

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After a minute Richmond reached over and closed his eyes—"to keep the visions in." Richmond then left. As he paused in the door, he looked back. The last thing he saw, he wrote later, was Catherine kissing William's hands.

Catherine died four years later. She often talked to her husband as if he were in the room, and in her last hours she called continually to him to say she was coming soon and would not be long from his side.

It is said that she died with one of his pencils in her hand.

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The Press and the Prose

JACQUES BARZUN

Early in the year, as usual, the *Wall Street Journal* published its State-of-the-Press Report. It listed seven main faults, each calmly and clearly set out, and it recommended five virtues or attitudes essential to ethical journalism. The Report was a splendid example of a profession's criticizing itself, a moving declaration of public responsibility—by one paper at least. But it left out a subject I think of equal importance. There was no mention of the written word. Of the five virtues urged as guides to improvement, the first was Accuracy, tersely defined as: "maximum effort to get it right." Surely this includes *putting* it right: how is that possible when the words are wrong?

The unhappy truth is that the prose of the press, and of broadcast news as well, has fallen below the level of competence that once obtained and that can reasonably be expected. It is not uniformly bad, but the faults are frequent and of many kinds. They may for convenience be discussed in three overlapping groups: blurred meanings; pretentiousness; and irrelevant fiction-style.

But before I explain and illustrate these defects, I should list my sources. What do I read that exemplifies what I find deplorable? Wherever I go to lecture or attend professional meetings, I make a point of reading the local paper. As a regular diet, I read the *New York Times* and also a weekly *Forbes* paper from New Jersey, the *Hills-Bedminster Press*. A friend of mine writes for it and I have developed a vicarious interest in the doings of the community. Then I spend varying stretches of time in the Southwest and read the papers of San Antonio and Santa Fe, as well as the *Dallas Morning News*, and sometimes *USA TODAY*. The broadcasts I listen to are the local or national ones at 6:00 P.M., in addition to which I scan the opinion weeklies here and there as chance dictates. I read more than would be good for me if I were not on my guard against contagious error.

Let me also be clear about my conception of error. I am not in the least bothered by the mistakes due to carelessness. I know under what pressure newspapers are put together and how haste causes slips of the pen and the mind. A plural subject with a verb in the singular; a dangling participle; the inconsistent "one of those who is"; the colloquial error of putting *who* and *whom* in just the wrong places; the tautology "the reason is because"; the use of *like* for *as*—none of this is mortal sin, because in spite of rocky grammar and inelegance it does no permanent harm to the language. Nor does it perceptibly lessen Accuracy. Serious damage begins when important words are used with false meanings or misleading connotations.

Two kinds of words make for false meaning: vogue words and malaprops. Some words belong to both kinds, for example the word *metaphor*, which is in vogue and continually misused: "*Dresden* is a metaphor for mass destruction." It is no such thing. *Dresden* is a symbol, an emblem, a sample, a reminder, a typical case, but metaphor it is not. A metaphor is a comparison based on four terms. It points not to a fact, but to a relation, which it compresses into a single word. When the ship *plows* the sea, the relations compared are those between the plow turning up the earth in a furrow and the ship cutting through the water and flinging it up on each

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side—*A* is to *B* as *C* is to *D*. Therefore *A* may be used to raise an image appropriate to *C*. Dresden does raise an image, but not through comparing ideas in pairs.

Vogue words reduce Accuracy in yet another way. By appearing again and again in all sorts of situations they keep better-fitting words out of use. Consider: "Senator Kennedy . . . tried to *address* the hurdle of his past." What a sentence! Everything these days is addressed instead of being dealt with, discussed, stated, mentioned, defined, taken up, met, treated, acknowledged, recognized, settled by the court, taken care of, resolved. How much more accurate the report if what actually took place were described by the one term that matches the reality. Here, among others, are vogue words that newspapers love to repeat and misuse at the same time: *preempt, ignite, mundane, avid, arcane, meld, testament, fundament, cohort, controversial, volatile, abrasive, strategy, scenario, legendary, conjuncture, sensitive, icon, arguable, problematic.* The last two are always ambiguous: is an opinion arguable when it can be argued *for* or when, being doubtful, it can be argued against? And must the old meaning of *problematic* (i.e., uncertain) give way to the new, confusing one of "beset with problems"?

The second group of wrong words, malaprops, is large, and the feature that makes them *malapropos* is not always the same. In the most obvious—obvious to knowing readers—the sense is totally mistaken. Such are: *fortuitous* for *fortunate, smattering* for *scattering, careen* for *career, precipitous* for *precipitate, unprepossessing* for *plain* or *homely, noisome* and *fulsome* for *noisy* and *complete,* and the like.

In a far wider group, what falsifies is the connotation—the sense implied; the idea raised misrepresents the fact. Thus when nine young people were crushed to death at the City College of New York by a huge crowd forcing its way into the gymnasium, two news stories referred to "the scene of carnage." That vivid word suggests torn flesh, bloodshed, and intentional violence besides: a railroad accident causing mangled bodies is not a scene of carnage. Its use to describe mass suffocation is a blunder.

Again, a caption under the photo of a protesting group reads: "Women shouting harangues at. . . ." A harangue is a speech, not an outcry, and the word connotes "long-winded," "preachy," "probably boring." It is a misfit for an angry squad yelling insults. Similarly, when a gold medal was stolen from the recipient, the reporter said it was *pilfered.* To *pilfer* is to take small sums or objects deviously, and perhaps for a time unnoticed. But why fuss? If the core meaning is apt enough, let the connotations go hang; the reader will get the drift. In that self-indulgence lies the permanent damage to the mother tongue. The reader does get the drift—or shrugs by without it—and so loses the habit of distinguishing, the ability to tell one fact or situation from another and to call each by its right name. What one reads with that indifference soon becomes what one says, and so the damage spreads.

It is not for nothing or by chance that words have developed connotations. To convey clustered meanings economically, words have been charged with information beyond the core meaning; that is their connotation. If they are reduced to the core by lazy minds, additional words are needed to re-inject that information into the statement—as had to be done above to unfold the full meanings of *harangue* and *pilfer.*

Not laziness but ignorance is at work in another group of misleaders. Apt words are frequently used in the press with a "direction" contrary to usage. I mean by *direction* what the grammar books call transitive and intransitive. Take *rankle.* It means to fester, to become a sore and a grievance. The action is triggered by an event and confined to the feelings inside one person. Hence to say that something rankles somebody, instead of *in* somebody, is nonsense—even if some recent dictionary allows it as a second usage. For the next step is total confusion: "Governor Cuomo's Musings Rankle." The plain sense of this is that the more he meditates, the sourer he gets; and that is not what was meant. Nor was it the loose secondary meaning, either. One had to read the story to discover a third meaning: his casual remarks *annoy* other people. Under any definition, *rankle* misstates the fact in two further ways: it is much too strong for *annoy,* and it implies the passage of time. The governor's faithful enemies were not given the leisure to grow still more irritated by yesterday's "musings."

Among the current crop of words that the press misdirects and misapplies, note especially: *boggle, translate, identify, entrenched, alarm* ("the door was alarmed"). Of such distortions,

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the hardest to interpret correctly at sight is *embattled.* It means armed and ready for battle. Ignorant use has turned it around so that half the time it stands for its opposite, *beset, cornered, beleaguered.* Again, one has to read the entire story before the bearing of the headline is clear. This need to revise one's first impression becomes a steady irritant; one is *berankled* at a high rate.

The errors so far come from a lack of knowledge or perhaps even more often from a failure to reflect. Once, when I mentioned the *pilfered* headline to a very able newspaperman, himself a generally careful writer, he said, "Yes, of course; I read it this morning but never gave it a thought." This thoughtlessness differs from the grammatical carelessness I mentioned above, because it betokens not a slip but a habit—a habit of indifference to the prime elements of communication. But alongside these negative faults, there are the positive ones that I characterized above as pretentiousness. Journalists are not the straightforward plain fellows they think they are.

That seems a hard saying, and before giving evidence I can somewhat lessen the charge against the press by dividing it: it applies to every profession. It is a by-product of science and technology, which have made people want to sound expert, masters of some mysterious specialty endowed with a unique vocabulary. And since the technological is always progressing, the would-be smart and up-to-date have to keep inventing new ways of glorifying the commonplace with fancy new terms.

That is how *metaphor,* a technical term if ever there was one, came to be plucked out of its scholarly retreat and made into an erroneous catchword. Other favorite technicalities of the press and the professions are: *dichotomy, parameter, paradigm, interface, dysfunctional, macrodimensional, synergy, catalyst, quantum leap, empathy, acidic, fixated,* and similar borrowings from the lab or the psychiatric ward: "She is phobic about car pools," meaning *uneasy.* Or again (about a talking computer): "a soothing but spooky, anodyne voice." *Anodyne* means giving relief from pain; but never mind, doesn't it sound slick and learned in that phrase? The syllables slip in and out of one's head without alighting on an idea. At the first encounter with such gems, one laughs, as pedantry always prompts one to do. How else respond to the news of a merger between two clothing firms "whose synergy is expected to be good"? But what has happened to the old response of contempt for the empty-headed show off?

A by-product of the love of technicalities is the urge to find "cover words" for our doings and feelings. I use the label to designate abstract terms akin to those deliberately coined in science to embrace—and also conceal—all particulars. A typical example transferred to workaday use is *precipitation.* It does not commit itself to rain, snow, sleet, or hail; anything may fall from the heavens, manna included. The now general impulse to cover is what gave birth to *media,* an unnecessary word and a bad one: it is not English, it acts plural when the idea was to wrap things up in a singular, and it doesn't even cover; it only points vaguely to some of the means of making news public. Are all periodicals, including the learned journals, among the media—or only some? What about the international news agencies? the government news releases issued in print or over the air? the endless newsletters of charitable and other organizations? Usage suggests that only newspapers and broadcasting in the private sector are media. Since "broadcast journalism" is also a current phrase, *journalism* or even better *air news* and *press* would have sufficed as before, simply by extending in the age-old way the scope of established words.

The failure to follow this practice is what gave us, way back, the now ineradicable *technology* and *methodology,* which properly mean the theory of technique and of method, not their products. But who would be content to say: "My method is . . ."? It is grander to say "methodology." Science and pretension join hands to validate the always longer word. The latest case I have observed is the Weather Bureau's announcement: "And here is the climatology for New York yesterday," meaning not the climate, but the weather—highs and lows of temperature and barometer. Of course, *weather* itself is no longer felt to cover sufficiently: it has to be *weather conditions.* Nor does anybody say: "I haven't the time to do it." The spontaneous excuse is: "The time factor is against me." It is fate thwarting the hero of a Greek tragedy.

Add to the list of cover words: *contact; approach; substance abuse; wellness; decision making* (deciding); *mentoring* (guiding, favoring); *parenting* (rear, raise, bring up, nurture, care for, train, cherish, or perhaps merely being a par-

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ent); *infrastructure* (middle-range employees or roads and bridges?); *facility* (offices, warehouse, laboratory, toilet); *proposition* (deal, offer); *format* (when not of books but about a conference or a picnic: details, features, arrangements); plus all the smart words in *-ize*, from *finalize, personalize,* and *prioritize* to such ad hoc formations as *Mirandize* (read the suspect his rights).

To this same cover class, but even more grotesque, belong the euphemisms of guild, government, and trade; for example, the retailer's *shrinkage* (loss by shoplifting); *discretionary promotion* (items chosen to spur a sale); *inventory discipline* (ordering from a supplier without promising to buy); *program vehicles* (cars for resale from rental companies). All these creations and cobblings look ridiculous to outsiders—and insiders, too, since they change so often. Again, laughter is healthy, but meanwhile the language is bastardized, made ever less exact, less vivid, less plain, less honest.

At this point the question may well be asked, Why so much verbal restlessness, so much *creativity* (another word that is vague, vogue, and covering)? Science and technics, being but the source or model, explain only a part. The remainder is due to two or three other driving forces in our agitated and agitating society—art and advertising, to begin with.

Literature started to turn and twist the language a little over a century ago. Poets, playwrights, and novelists worked hard to get away from the vernacular by distorting meanings, grammar, and syntax. One of their reasons, I must report, was to combat the pernicious influence of the newspaper. It had but recently been made cheap and free of censorship; the masses read it and it molded their minds. To the aesthetic, journalism was the essence of banality. Their task was to mark a difference between vulgarity and art, prosiness and prose. In so doing they accustomed the educated public to continual novelties, the more surprising the better. The thing to do was to create usage, not observe it. Soon advertisers saw the utility of shock-for-attention and began to fiddle, more demurely, with the vocabulary of their lures and slogans. They are still at it. Read today the ads for fashionable clothes and see what talent can do to suggest wonders and delights and say nothing you can pin down. James Joyce did not work in vain.

Such was the great shift that led people at large to stop thinking of language as a social instrument, which the individual must use correctly and preserve whole, and to regard it as a private possession to be played with at will. This reversal parallels the change from critical remembrance of things past to uncritical, unlimited, automatic future-ism: every new thing is better than any old thing.

By the change, simplicity was driven out of fashion; it now looks primitive, inartistic, uneducated. Who today would not feel embarrassed to write: "Riches are for spending, and spending for honour and good actions. Therefore extraordinary expense must be limited by the worth of the occasion"? On the face of it, Bacon was naïve, and, by the way, what is he saying? It's not easy to make out what he had in mind with his short, flat-footed words, his "honour" and "good actions." The poor man did not know enough to speak of "accumulated resources," "conspicuous consumption," "charitable purposes," and "psychological moment."

The modern cult of art and complication, intense though not exactly profound, has brought into journalism an even newer novelty—the stance of fiction to start a news report: "Piles of freshly raked leaves, a couple of daring boys on skateboards, and the lazy smile of an old mutt lend a contented, reassuring feel to this middle-class neighborhood in suburban Denver." Or more brisk and sophisticated: "The sky is streaked with violet and the cocktails have turned watery by the time the Senator, a late arrival, clambers onto the dock." Now, I don't want to read that. I want the traditional, first-paragraph lead, which when well done is infinitely better prose than this feeble imitation of story openings in the old *Saturday Evening Post.*

It is no excuse that the fake fictional style ushers in feature stories rather than news, for what has happened at the same time is that much more news than before is now given in the feature form. Perhaps the adoption of the byline, formerly unknown in journalism, encourages this "creativity." But there is worse: the demise of the lead often goes with the postponement—and sometimes the omission—of important details. For example, a headline states that two Palestinian scholars will attend an international conference in Madrid. One must read thirty lines before one can learn who they are and from what university here or abroad. In another story

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about eight nations involved in GATT negotiations, five were declared the most concerned and their claims were discussed at length; the other three were never named.

Part of this breakdown in essential news-telling is due to the prominence newly accorded to "views." Long before one is told precisely who or what the plan or complaint, the agent, site, or victim is, half-a-dozen officials, experts, or heads of interest groups have had their say. Is the reporter's hope that this string of spur-of-the-moment remarks will give the thrill of a "clash of opinions"? No doubt the voguish doctrine that "perception is all" unconsciously inspires this demotion of news to near the bottom of the story. The trained reader jumps from the headline to paragraph ten, hoping it will inform.

My main subject, the duty of the press to give the news straight and plain, has brought us from the large-scale misuse of words to the arch mannerisms of their ushering and the social implications of their ordering on the page. This close linkage is in the nature of things: words are for communication, which presupposes two parties equipped with the same means and obeying the same conventions. One can hardly imagine a do-as-you-like Morse code; a convention defeats itself if expectations are flouted. True, a whole people, diverse in origins, habits, and interests cannot observe with rigor all the conventions of language. The tendency, particularly in speech, is to go off in all directions and continually break the tacit agreement, the conventions called usage. Such has been the history of language everywhere and at all times.

But change in the past was generally spontaneous, not to say unconscious; it arose from humble ignorance; it was slow and haphazard. I have tried to show how and why it has become deliberate, highbrow, and rapid; words are shot down from their perch of significance like birds in the open season. This carnage strongly suggests an obligation on the part of professionals of the word to act as a brake on the trend, as referees in what, without a brake, is a free-for-all. The press, by definition the most ceaseless and influential of word-users, seems to me to have that obligation in the highest degree.

This reminder, this demand, is not inappropriate; nor does it imply a too exalted idea of the press. Consider two things: the basis of its influence and the range of its privileges. The newspaper has ceased to be a *paper of news.* It is no longer the mere narrator of the latest events of public importance, the four-page gazette that the citizenry can safely ignore if it chooses to. Instead, we have something approaching book length and purveying large doses of individual, indeed domestic information. The modern newspaper is a daily encyclopedia, social register, and business directory. In place of a few brief notices telling where another coffee shop or haberdasher has opened in the town, there are now endless pages of sales and other competitive offers, minutely described—a shopping manual for every need. Besides pages on national sports, columns on local entertainments past and to come receive their due, and so does instant pleasure in the form of comic strips.

The still broader offering on the air and the screen is so well known that it needs only passing mention. In the paper, again, legal notices, weather forecasts, sites of road repairs, educational opportunities, honors and awards serve practical and often personal ends. Other private matters—deaths, marriages, thefts, and arrests—are chronicled as if world events; readers' outcries appear on the Letters page, with horoscopes nearby and a crossword puzzle in a corner, while article after article teaches how to bring up children, "whip up a simple dress," treat conjunctivitis or hemorrhoids, weed the garden, play bridge and chess, behave after divorce or during adultery, and obtain one's refund from the miserly gas company or a reluctant mail-order house.

The list as it stands leaves out what we tend to believe is the main fare and function of the newspaper: reporting disasters and politics and offering editorial and syndicated opinion. In making a table of actual contents I have not revealed anything that was not obvious before—obvious but overlooked, especially as to one result which is our present subject: because the press covers so much of life and draws on so many sources, everybody—in a sense—contributes to it: all the professions, certainly, and many lay members of the community. And simultaneously, everybody is being taught by it. Along that great circle of mutual influence, the language is the instrument that gets blunted. All the vogues and solecisms of whatever origin—business, government, the

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academy, the law, and the sciences—get in the press their welcome and their entrenchment, and through it their dissemination.

In this reality lies the first reason why the press should take a hand in preserving accuracy of speech. Newspapers have earnestly encouraged environmental conservation; the linguistic environment is likewise in peril and deserves their assistance. They can give it silently, without any preaching, simply by self-awareness and self-criticism. All newspapers have a style book containing the rules that make headline wording, font, type size, titles, punctuation, and similar details uniform. Add a *style* book in the fuller sense and appoint an arbiter of usage (not a pedant or a crank) to monitor observance of the code, and the thing is done.

It may be asked why independent journalism should attempt any such thing, should become activist, when its proper role is not to do but to report others' doings. The answer is not only that in reporting it acts—to write is to do something to the public mind and to the language—it is also, as I hinted above, that the press has implicit obligations because it is the most privileged institution in society.

The status of the press may be defined without irony as that of The-Know-It-All. How else could it discharge its duty of universal watchdog and defender of rights and liberties? Being entrusted with this omniscience, it should not ignore any public concern. And to defend includes protecting where it can. Think of the means granted to the press in the form of exemption from law and custom. In effect, the journalist can do no wrong, and he pays for this royal prerogative by being subjected to stronger temptations and worse conflicts of interest than any other professional.

All these, it can be shown, touch at some point the mandate of Accuracy. The reporter must tell the plain truth, but his prestige and promotion and the sale of his paper depend on making the truth sensational. He battles for everybody's rights, but must often infringe them to investigate; the right of privacy is the first to go. Indeed, the vigilant newshounds often thrive by others' wrongs—leaks, stolen papers, malicious denunciations. Sifting these has to be done hurriedly (and perhaps erringly) so as to be out with the startling news first. To protect the consequences of haste, the libel law has been relaxed, and with it others' rights to vindicate their good name. Only reckless disregard of the truth is actionable, which seems to say that plain disregard is the normal state and a special frenzy is needed to make it a wrong.

At other times, the sense of proportion must be suspended, as when a single point in an hour-long speech is blown up into a bombshell and that is all the public is treated to. A trifle like ordinary decency is regularly held negligible, as when a new program, the name of an appointee, or some other announcement is published ahead of time. The principle here is the press's right to demand full disclosure of everything by everybody as soon as anybody knows of it. Meanwhile, the press enjoys privacy and secrecy for the sake of its sources, on which depends its livelihood.

In sum, the press works according to needs and rights, and claims, all valid and all inconsistent. Together they produce the reporter's state of perpetual temptation: he is Don Juan in charge of a nunnery.

But on reflection this large trust and the ever-present imperative of Accuracy suggest no more than an abstract duty of caring for the means of expression. A writer for the press might well ask for a concrete reason—who will benefit? First, himself and his colleagues and next, his customers, that is to say the class to which he belongs—yes, the class. For it is evident that the mangling of the language today comes from the educated class, of which journalists form part. You do not hear the construction worker say that the building he is working on is a metaphor for urban overcrowding, or the enlisted man at Fort Sam Houston complain that his sergeant shouts harangues at him during drill. It is the sizable part of the population that now goes to college who talk and write these absurdities. College apparently does nothing to prevent the blight, those who teach being infected like the rest of us.

The underlying cause throughout is the same mindlessness noted earlier. I have before me a memorandum written by a corporate executive. It reads: "The package obviously past mustard with the bank." The writing is in longhand and signed, so there is no hope of blaming a secretary. A schoolteacher a while ago informed me: "He died of cancer of the panacea." At a gathering of professional people, I

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overheard: "Politics makes strange buffaloes." I turned around to look at the face of the speaker—no sign of his having tried to be funny, and among the listeners only two seemed startled and embarrassed. It is such speakers, by the way, who scorn the classical languages as useless and who produce the hybrids with which the corporate world has replaced human and product names: *Unisys, Digicon, Pendaflex,* and the like.

Few escape the insidious force of so much surrounding error. In an otherwise well-written letter to the *New York Times,* the inditer says: "I decided to make a concerted effort to buy American." Now a concerted effort is one made by more than one person, by several *in concert.* But the phrase is one of those unexamined terms floating in the pollution around us; it is echoed in spite of what it means; the parrot is role model. If you doubt the fact, note how often you hear or read that something or other has undergone a *sea change.* The papers repeat the tag as if by reflex action in contexts where it can mean only change, nothing more.

This delight in *sea change* confirms the perception that the bad prose of journalism is not the product of humble ignorance, of an unfortunate lack of schooling. It is the higher illiteracy. One finds it afresh in the papers' helter-skelter use of French phrases and farfetched, would-be learned analogies: an error made by a sports announcer is termed a *fait accompli;* a meeting of groups of diverse national origins is called *a pastiche* of greater New York; an altercation between two persons is characterized as a *mêlée;* the charred trunks of trees after a West Coast fire are said to look like Stonehenge; and to really impress the public, the uprooting of some trees on the East Coast is termed in the headline an *Arborcide,* which should be arboricide if it had any right to exist at all. These examples, I might add, were culled like all the others I have cited, within ten weeks. They are, alas, not exceptional.

Amid this welter, it is to the everlasting credit of one Washington reporter that the press and the rest of us have been denied the pleasure of misusing *synecdoche.* He found the word in a government release, with the meaning "partial disclosure," and he ridiculed it to such effect that his colleagues left it alone. Like *metaphor,* the term belongs to rhetoric; it means naming a part for the whole: "thirty sails" for "thirty ships." The killing of *synecdoche* is a noble precedent. What one challenger can do, others can, and the use of reason need not take the form of an outcry; to write without vandalizing, silent self-control is enough.

But it is only fair to warn that an effort of this kind (concerted) would meet with protest from one powerful vested interest, the linguists. For exactly a century they have been waging war against restraint. Their motto is "Anything Goes"; one authority among them affirmed it: "no native speaker can make a mistake." The reason behind the dogma is that since language has always changed and many changes have been due to lapses from usage, all lapses are and ought to be free and equal.

The interest I have called vested consists in collecting and recording these changes; it is a quasi-scientific sport like bird-watching, and it affords the same sense of superiority and pride in lecturing the laity. Only, this sport with language disregards the purpose for which language is made, a purpose that requires if not fixity of usage, which is impossible, at least steadiness and slow change. To cheer deviation and urge it on to higher speed, while also rebuking those who want to reduce it, is thus a deliberate assault on culture. It is moreover an attempt to deny the critics of misuse their equal right to denounce lapses and to keep their words clear.

Does this latter choice mean that the inherited vocabulary must suffer no addition, even if new ideas and new objects call for new names? Nothing so foolish is implied. New words and idioms, new meanings grafted on old words are indispensable. The dictionary is not a closed book. But like other innovations in engineering or medicine or anywhere else, these neologisms should be at once practical and harmless. Many good ones are accepted yearly without demur. But there is an art—or an instinct—to making quality products. Short, unambiguous, English-sounding are three of the requisites. Among the host of the recent newcomers are: *fax* (machine), *kneeling bus, summit* (meeting), *sleaze, tokenism, skyjacking, mouse* (in computer parlance), *snorkel, networking, brain drain, fail-safe, hawk* and *dove* (in relation to war)—these and a good many others are excellent. They are really new, and for new things; whereas the novelties I have deprecated are either duplicates of existing terms or ill-begotten products of ignorance and conceit.

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The linguists' crusade is often carried on under the flag of democratic freedom, with the corollary that any expression is as fit as another. Yet these doctrinaires sometimes show that the correctness they dispute has its appeal. When they, quite rightly, give attention to dialects and note them down with care, they often act as guardians of purity. If a novelist makes a character say: "I ain't fixin' to go," the linguist pounces with the proof that the *right* phrasing is: "I ain't fixin' *for* to go." All of us react the same way when we come across English attempts to reproduce American slang. There is something, after all, to the feeling of right and wrong in speech.

The same reasoning applies against the advocates of tolerance for those who brush aside distinctions between related words—*precipitous* and *precipitate, assure* and *ensure, disinterested* and *uninterested, advance* and *advancement, proceed* and *precede, comprise* and *compose, sensuous* and *sensual,* and many other pairs. Such persons not only fail to appreciate how convenient it is to have two words from a common root to convey subtly different ideas; they also fail to see that in their own talk they make rigorous distinctions and would not tolerate their being blurred: they say a *woody* plant, a *wooded* area, a *wooden* leg and do not switch the adjectives at random. They do not confuse *a flashlight* with *a flashing light,* or *populous* with *popular*—or, for that matter, *Medicaid* with *Medicare,* though these two words are distressingly alike.

In any case, how far can latitude be extended, out of charity, to the helpless when they face a vocabulary as rich as that of English? In a recent news story of a crash landing, the public was told: "About two minutes later, heading north, he guided the plane in perpendicular to the highway, struck a guard rail, and skidded across three lanes. . . ." Will it be allowable hereafter to make *perpendicular* and *parallel* interchangeable? It would seem logical: the native writer who cannot make a mistake also has the First Amendment right to use words as he pleases.

I acknowledge once again how exacting, taxing, at times bewildering are the demands made on those who day after day bang out in the shortest possible time the stories we read the next morning. We take them for granted as if they were the fruits of the quiet study, composed and revised at leisure under the shaded lamp. But when all allowance has been made for errors due to momentary want of attention, there remain those that come from habitual, reckless disregard of attention, and that as a result have been built into the mind groping for expression.

I have suggested one means of steering that mind out of its rut, namely, installing a critic in the house who will make the guidelines of a style book clear and reiterate its warnings. But that is obviously the cure after the ailment is chronic. What is needed besides is the preventive medicine of a proper training for fledgling journalists. Its essence is also obvious: instilling the attitude toward words that the musician has toward sound and the painter toward line and color. Such a training should begin in college, if earlier is beyond hope. Perhaps at the moment many colleges are unwilling to take on the task. The one recourse left is to the schools of journalism, sometimes called Schools of Communication (a cover word and hardly truthful). What do they teach? The one at my alma mater is a graduate school, no less. And others, too, enjoy graduate rank. On what basis? In teaching the art of communication, what higher structure of thought and greater verbal power have they built, and on what grounding?

Whatever the answer, is it not clear that no part of a journalist's training matters more than to make him or her a master of the medium of expression? The tricks of the trade are necessary, too, but in their school form they are quickly learned, and it is only after practice in the field that they stamp the worker as a professional. It is otherwise with the use of words; a school *can* train its students to write plain prose. There is no question of making artists, though some will show the requisite gifts. What is wanted is a set of habits beyond the tricks: the habit of attending to words, words out there and inside one's head and one's mouth, words without whose precise application to reality any claim to the virtue of Accuracy is an empty boast.

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George Eliot for Grown-Ups

GERTRUDE HIMMELFARB

George Eliot is a great novelist and *Middlemarch* is, by common consent, her greatest novel. The English critic F. R. Leavis, who was no slouch at pronouncing novels great or less than great, opened *The Great Tradition* with a long account of George Eliot, in which *Middlemarch* appears as the culmination of her "mature genius."

Leavis was also a great moralist, which is perhaps why he was so well disposed to Eliot. He quotes Henry James, who said that for Eliot the novel was not, as it was for most novelists, a "picture of life" but rather a "moralized fable." Lord Acton, perhaps one of the most rigorous moralists in Victorian England (as well as one of the most learned men), described Eliot as "a consummate expert in the pathology of conscience." "You cannot think how much I owed her," he wrote to Mary Gladstone after Eliot's death. "Of eighteen or twenty writers by whom I was conscious that my mind has been formed, she was one." When one considers the other writers who formed Acton's mind—philosophers, theologians, historians—that is no mean tribute.

Virginia Woolf, on the other hand, was not much of a moralist; indeed she had a profound distrust of moralists, as she also had for conventional morality—which is why she was so ill disposed to most Victorians. Yet she declared *Middlemarch* "one of the few English novels written for grown-ups." Even for her, however, part of the fascination of the book was the moral complexity of the characters.

Which brings us to the hoary question that inevitably arises in any discussion of *Middlemarch*: Why does Dorothea marry Ladislaw? It seems a trivial, simpleminded question to ask of a book that has been given so much moral weight by such high-minded thinkers as Leavis and Acton. It is also an odd question to ask of a book that has been so highly praised, because it suggests that there may be a serious flaw at the very heart of it. In fact, it was a question raised by contemporary reviewers as well as present-day critics, some of whom did find it a serious flaw—or at least an unresolved question.

In the prelude to the novel, Eliot, with obvious reference to her heroine, invokes the image of Saint Theresa, whose "passionate ideal nature demanded an epic life," perhaps even martyrdom. In Dorothea's case, we soon discover, it is not a religious vocation but a secular one that the young woman seeks, a desire to lead a life that transcends her personal interests and happiness, a purposeful and elevated, moral life. It is for this reason that she rejects her first suitor, Sir James Chettam, an amiable but irresolute young man, and chooses instead to marry the Reverend Edward Casaubon, an unprepossessing and unsuitable mate (he is more than forty-five years old, while she is not quite eighteen), but who has for her the great attraction of being dedicated to a large intellectual enterprise, a comprehensive key to all mythologies. It is a tragic marriage even before Casaubon's untimely death (they had been married only eighteen months), for he turns out to be something of a fraud as a scholar, so that Dorothea, who had thought to find her own salvation in his work, is bereft both spiritually and morally.

The young Dr. Lydgate, a newcomer to Middlemarch, has a different but no less powerful sense of vocation. He aspires to make a great scientific discovery (the "primitive tis-

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✪ GERTRUDE HIMMELFARB's most recent book is *On Looking into the Abyss: Untimely Thoughts on Culture and Society* (Knopf, 1994).

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sue" that is the basis of life), which will serve not only his community but all of mankind. As he puts it, he hopes to do "good small work for Middlemarch, and great work for the world." Lydgate would seem to meet all of Dorothea's requirements of a husband; he is an eminently eligible mate. Many readers of *Middlemarch* in its serial form, including Henry James, expected her to marry Lydgate after Casaubon died. Even today, this is a constant reproach to Eliot. Shortly after the novel was televised on PBS, a letter appeared in the *New York Times Book Review* commenting on an earlier article by the novelist Mary Gordon, who had described *Middlemarch* as a "tragic and ironic" novel. The writer of the letter recalled her own professor, many years earlier, using exactly the same words. Asked to explain them, he had said, "Because Dorothea belonged with Lydgate and vice versa."

To be sure, Lydgate is already married by the time that Dorothea is widowed—unhappily married because his wife Rosamond is as frivolous as Casaubon was pompous. His marriage, however, need not have been an impediment to the union of Dorothea and Lydgate. Rosamond might have died, in childbirth or a cholera epidemic. Or Lydgate and Rosamond might have been divorced; divorce was difficult but not impossible at the time. Or they might have entered into the kind of extramarital relationship that Eliot herself had with George Lewes.

The plot does not take any of these turns because Dorothea is attracted not to Lydgate but to the young artist Will Ladislaw. And Ladislaw, judged by Dorothea's own standards (and by comparison with Lydgate), is a rather pathetic character: "dilettantish and amateurish" as another artist, a friend, describes him. Even if he were a serious artist, that would not have endeared him to Dorothea, who confesses that "art is a language I do not understand." More important, he is something of a sensualist and hedonist; "the best piety," he tells her, "is to enjoy." When he does, finally, embark upon a political career, it is not as an idealist but as a pragmatist; he will be a reformer but not a zealous one.

Why, then, does Dorothea marry Ladislaw—a "light creature," Henry James describes him, and then, in a damning phrase, "a woman's man"? Dorothea cannot explain it even to her sister. "You have to feel for me," she tells her. The most obvious explanation of that "feeling"—for the modern reader, at least—is sex. Dorothea, it is reasonably assumed, has been starved of sexuality with Casaubon (there are critics who find intimations of impotence in the novel, but even if that is not quite so, he was hardly a passionate or romantic character), and in Ladislaw she seeks the sexual fulfillment she did not have with Casaubon.

There are several problems with this interpretation. First, Eliot would have been quite capable of expressing this sexual attraction had she so wished (and as she did in *Adam Bede*). Second, this does not explain why Dorothea chooses Ladislaw over Lydgate, who is no less attractive sexually. Third, and more important, this interpretation vitiates the theme of the book, for it deprives it of its moral dimension and its moral tension.

Dorothea marries Ladislaw, according to her own account, because she loves him and he loves her. *Middlemarch* in this respect is a classic Victorian love story, with the woman giving up her estate to marry the man she loves, and the man giving up his inheritance to gain the respect of his beloved. But it is also, as Henry James said, a "moralized fable." Ladislaw attracts Dorothea precisely because he is morally flawed, an imperfect human being—which provides her with her mission: to redeem him. It is her love for him and faith in him that make him a better human being, so that he can be worthy both of her and of society. His is not an exalted mission; Ladislaw in Parliament is not going to be a heroic character aspiring to transform society. But he will be a sensible, moderate reformer. To paraphrase Lydgate, he will do "good small work for the country," rather than "great work for the world."

For Dorothea to marry Lydgate, on the other hand, would have been too easy, lacking in moral drama. Lydgate needed no redeeming; he knew exactly what he wanted to do and was entirely capable of doing it. He did not even need a wife to help him—only not to hinder him. With Lydgate, there would have been no moral tension to resolve, no conflict between pleasure and work; his pleasure was his work. In this respect, he was like Casaubon, except that, unlike Casaubon, his work was real and realizable; his subject, after all, was science, not mythology.

The parallel between Casaubon's search for

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the "key" to all mythologies and Lydgate's for the "single tissue" as the basis of life is obvious. One commentator, W. J. Harvey, points to a passage in the novel intimating that Eliot believed the tissue theory to be mistaken. He also cites the notes she made, in preparation for her book, on an essay by T. H. Huxley that supports the cell theory. But, as Huxley said in that essay, even a false hypothesis may well further science. And Eliot clearly differentiated Casaubon's thoroughly futile work, which was ignorant of an earlier generation of German scholars, from Lydgate's, which was to be disproved somewhat later. (The final irony, Harvey points out, is that the tissue theory is more in keeping with present-day biochemistry than is the cell theory.)

A different kind of moral drama would have been an illicit love affair between Dorothea and Lydgate, an out-of-wedlock relationship like that of Eliot and Lewes. But this, too, was not what Eliot had in mind, for it would have been to countenance, even to romanticize and idealize, an arrangement that Eliot regarded, in her own case, as an unfortunate necessity. Some modern feminists regard Eliot as a "role model" for the liberated woman, praising her for defying the bourgeois, patriarchal convention of marriage by living with the man she loved without benefit of clergy. But she did not willfully choose that role; she had no alternative, since Lewes was already married and could not get a divorce. (After fathering three children with his wife, he condoned her affair with his friend, Thornton Hunt, with whom his wife had another three children, while Hunt himself was married to another woman.)

Although Eliot lived with Lewes in that "irregular relationship," as the Victorians delicately put it ("alternative life-style," we would say today), she tried to "regularize" it by making it as much like a proper marriage as possible, and their twenty-four years together were spent in perfect domesticity and fidelity. She referred to Lewes as her "husband" and to herself as his "wife"; she dedicated *Mill on the Floss* to "my beloved husband, George Henry Lewes"; she signed her letters "Marian Lewes," asked her friends to address her as "Mrs. Lewes," and had the satisfaction of having the real Mrs. Lewes do just that. And after Lewes died, she married John Cross, with all the trappings of a proper marriage: a trousseau, a church wedding, and a honeymoon.

No, an out-of-wedlock relationship with Lydgate was not the moral Eliot wanted to convey in her novel and not the fate she had sought for her heroine (any more than she had sought it for herself). Neither was Dorothea to be a Saint Theresa, living a life of pure idealism and self-abnegation. The mature Dorothea (not much older in years but much older in experience and wisdom) has come to terms with reality—without, however, succumbing to cynicism or egoism. She loves Ladislaw, for all his weaknesses, knowing that he is nevertheless capable of true good—not "great work" but "good small work." And it is this kind of good work that, for Dorothea, is the true meaning of morality.

At one point, while she is still married to Casaubon, Dorothea tells Ladislaw, "I used to pray so much—now I hardly ever pray." "Now I hardly ever pray." That, for Eliot, was the great problem of morality in the modern secular age. How, in the absence of religion, can morality—a purely secular morality—prevail? Having herself lost her religious faith, she was haunted, as many of her generation were, by what in *Middlemarch* she called "moral chaos" —the fear that religious skepticism would lead to moral laxity or, worse, to nihilism, that the disbelief in immortality would result in immorality. One recalls her much-quoted remark: Asked how morality can subsist in the absence of religious faith, she replied that God is "inconceivable," immortality "unbelievable," but Duty nonetheless "peremptory and absolute."

It is not clear what would sustain that secular idea of duty. But it is clear that if it were to replace religion, it had to be available to everyone, just as religion was. It had to be a democratic morality, as it were, a morality fit not for heroes, or saints, or geniuses, but for ordinary people—not just for a Lydgate who could aspire to great work, but for a Ladislaw who, like most human beings, was capable only of good work. That is a large "only," for to Eliot it meant all the difference between a moral and an immoral society, one that knows no higher values than hedonism and egoism and one imbued with altruism and a sense of duty. "We are all of us," Eliot wrote in one of the most memorable sentences in *Middlemarch*, "born in moral stupidity, taking the world as an udder to feed our supreme selves." To overcome that state of "moral stupidity" we have to wean ourselves of our in-

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fantile egoism and become morally mature adults, responsible and dutiful. In Ladislaw we witness precisely that maturation, the coming to moral adulthood.

This brings us to an even more difficult problem. Why does Dorothea, who carries the moral burden of the book and who has, more than any other character, attained a state of moral maturity, have to find her own moral purpose in being a wife—first to Casaubon and then to Ladislaw, both of whom are clearly her moral inferiors? Why does she have to marry at all? Or if she does choose to marry, why does she have to be merely the helpmate in that marriage? Surely she is capable of "good work," if not "great work," on her own. In the Finale, Dorothea intimates as much when she wonders whether there was "something better which she might have done," and her friends "think it a pity that so substantive and rare a creature should have been absorbed into the life of another, and be only known in a certain circle as a wife and mother."

For the modern reader, who cannot but see the figure of George Eliot behind Dorothea, this thought is even more troublesome. For Eliot was not only the creator of great works, she was also an independent spirit. Why could she not create an equally independent spirit in Dorothea, a woman who would not be "absorbed into the life of another" and was not merely "a wife and mother"? Why, in short, could she not have given us a Dorothea more congenial to a modern feminist?

The simple answer is that Eliot herself was not a feminist in the modern sense. She did not flout her defiance of convention by living with Lewes without marrying him; on the contrary, she tried to observe the forms of marriage as much as possible. Nor did she subscribe to one of the elementary tenets of feminism, women's suffrage. In 1867, five years before *Middlemarch*, a group of women, knowing of Eliot's interest in women's education (she was a charter subscriber to Girton College, the first college for women), called upon her to sign a petition supporting John Stuart Mill's amendment that would have enfranchised women. She refused, explaining that she favored any reform that would give the sexes "an equivalence of advantages . . . as to education and the possibilities of free development," but she did not believe the vote would further that purpose. The fact that women have "the worse share in existence," she said, should inspire "a sublimer resignation in woman and a more regenerating tenderness in man."

If this explanation seems unpersuasive to us today, we should remember that other prominent women writers (Charlotte Brontë, Mrs. Gaskell, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Christina Rossetti, and others) shared her opposition to women's suffrage, although for different reasons: because it would distract from more important issues (such as the reform of the divorce or property laws); or because they believed that women's education should precede the vote; or because (this on the part of some Liberals) women were more likely to vote Conservative; or because it would undermine what was felt to be the uniquely feminine quality of women. "Surely," one well-known woman wrote, when the issue came up again later in the century, "we need some human beings who will watch and pray, who will observe and inspire, and above all, who will guard and love all who are weak, unfit or distressed? Is there not a special service of woman, as there is a special service of man?" This was the formidable intellectual and socialist Beatrice Webb speaking. Eliot would have agreed with her about little else, but she would have agreed with this.

There is no discussion of the suffrage, or any other overtly feminist subject, in *Middlemarch*. But the book is undeniably a challenge to modern feminists. The idea that only in marriage can Dorothea find her personal happiness as well as her moral mission seems peculiarly Victorian. And so it is. For the Victorians, even for Victorian feminists, marriage and family were the primary human relationships, so that the champions of women's suffrage, university education, divorce reform, property rights, birth control, or any other feminist cause had to demonstrate that their proposals were compatible with marriage and family. Victorian families, recent scholarship has shown, were not nearly as oppressive or patriarchal as was once thought. But the idea of the family was very nearly sacrosanct, and that idea implied that men and women had distinctive natures and virtues which bound them together in a complex relationship of rights, duties, and, if they were fortunate, love.

Early in the novel, we are told, Dorothea has

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a "childlike idea about marriage"; she thinks that "the really delightful marriage must be that where your husband was a sort of father, and could teach you even Hebrew, if you wished it." Casaubon disillusions her of that idea. But he does not disillusion her of the idea of marriage. At the end of the novel, Dorothea sees marriage as "a great beginning," although fraught with difficulties. "It is . . . the beginning of the home epic—the gradual conquest or irremediable loss of that complete union which makes the advancing years a climax, and age the harvest of sweet memories in common." The Lydgates' marriage was a failure because Rosamond did not understand the nature of marriage; she thought her discontent was with her husband, whereas it was with "the conditions of marriage itself, . . . its demand for self-suppression and tolerance." Dorothea never made that mistake. Even when she was most displeased with Casaubon, she did not rebel against marriage itself. "Permanent rebellion," we are told, "the disorder of a life without some loving reverent resolve, was not possible to her."

Love and reverence, that is the message of *Middlemarch*. And that is the motto engraved on Eliot's memorial stone in Westminster Abbey. It is a quotation from one of her earliest stories, "Janet's Repentance": "The first condition of human goodness is something to love: the second something to reverence."

If the modern feminist, or the modern woman, finds it difficult to accept that message, she may prefer to find the moral of *Middlemarch* in the fact that Dorothea, not Ladislaw, is the hero of the book. Not only Dorothea but the other women characters are, for good or bad, more interesting and effectual than the men. It is the women who make their men what they become: decent, worthy, happy citizens like Ladislaw and Fred Vincy, or embittered failures like Lydgate, who, so far from making his great scientific discovery about the nature of life, settles for writing a book on gout, "a disease," Eliot wryly comments, "which has a good deal of wealth on its side."

Dorothea is no Saint Theresa. But she is an unsung hero—unsung, that is, to everyone except Eliot—and to the reader of *Middlemarch*. The last words of the book are her memorial:

> Her finely-touched spirit had still its fine issues, though they were not widely visible. Her full nature . . . spent itself in channels which had no great name on the earth. But the effect of her being on those around her was incalculably diffusive: for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs.

This is not a tragic ending, not even a "tragic irony." It is, as Eliot meant it to be, eminently moral, even heroic—an appropriate conclusion to a novel that, as Virginia Woolf said, was "written for grown-ups."

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Epitaph

BRUCE GUERNSEY

On top of a hill
one day in the fall

just up
from where I'd stopped

to try the well
by an old cellar hole

I found, bleached as bone,
a headstone

blank without
the name or date—

no others at all
there on that knoll

retaken by alders
and saplings of poplar,

just that one, white
and mute,

cut by him
her dying left dumb,

who'd shouldered it on
and cradled to ground

then closing his eyes
stood for a time

and touching that stone
turned back down.

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MEMOIR

Remembering Clement Greenberg

MORRIS FREEDMAN

When I joined *Commentary* as an associate editor, in 1953, I had just emerged from the Ph.D. cocoon at Columbia University. I had committed myself to the doctoral regimen there in English and comparative literature shortly after my discharge from the air force in 1946. During this time I also taught English at the City College of New York and wrote for a range of journals, including *Commentary*, and I was happy to be invited to join the staff shortly after I got my diploma. Tenure at CCNY was remote and freelance writing perilous.

I was especially pleased to work with persons whose writing I had long admired, such as Clement Greenberg. He was already recognized as one of the country's major art critics and on the rise to becoming probably the most influential one of our time, not only in this country but internationally. He had been among those instrumental in establishing New York and its new painting as equal in achievement and influence with Paris. In an already celebrated *Partisan Review* essay, in 1939, "Avant Garde and Kitsch," he had given currency to the word *kitsch* in its present, most common, meaning, to describe hackneyed, corny, tasteless but widely popular works of art and objects. In an equally important essay in the *Partisan Review* the following year, "Towards a Newer Laocoon," he had engagingly and persuasively laid out the grounds on which he came to build his criticism. "My own experience of art," he wrote toward the end of that early statement with modest confidence and balance, "has forced me to accept most of the standards of taste from which abstract art has derived, but I do not maintain that they are the only valid standards through eternity. . . . I am still able to enjoy a Rembrandt more for its expressive qualities than for its achievement of abstract values—as rich as it may be in them."

Greenberg had been critical in my own continued education, through his essays in the *Nation* and *Partisan Review*. He had given me an early understanding of the work of Miro, Klee, Mondrian, and Pollock. I began reading him late in college and continued in air force libraries in Texas. At CCNY, my undergraduate alma mater, we got an inkling of art in a remarkable lecture course by a Professor Eggers, who made classical and modern painting and sculpture as stimulating for me as literature. As a result, I started going to art museums regularly, alone and on dates; they were free, and the subway fare then was only a nickel.

Eggers's course and Greenberg's writing caused me to begin to look fully at what I saw, in museums and the world at large, to begin sensing that I was responding differently to different paintings and sculptures and to all sorts of artifacts, that I was distinguishing between those that pleased me in some way and those that didn't, and to begin to wonder what the differences might be. Less specifically but more broadly, Greenberg's critical style—looking intently, patiently, at a work, then setting down responses directly, plainly, the writing reduced to its barest, most functional end—affected my own writing and, inevitably, of course, my own responses.

Clem was one of the original editors of *Commentary*, having been with Elliot Cohen, its first editor-in-chief, at *The Contemporary Jewish Record*, its predecessor. I ran into Clem in the

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offices after it had published my fictionalized reminiscences of a Russian-Zionist actress my mother knew, whom I called Madame Vishnak. I was calling him "Clem" by then. An earlier story, describing an air force drill involving responses to poison gas, and my reportage about CCNY had already appeared. He remarked about the Madame Vishnak sketches, with an approving nod, that he thought it perhaps better to portray that bohemian world, linking culture and politics, with fiction than reporting.

His comment resonated over the years. I dredge it up as I read through the recently issued four volumes of his collected writings.* Each volume also contains a year-by-year listing of Clem's activities in the period covered by the contents. One revelation was to discover how many details of his life and mine were parallel: parents from east Europe, committed socialists dedicated to opera; English and Yiddish in early childhood; New York City high schools; civil service employment after college; air force service in World War II, his in Oklahoma, mine in Texas; freelance writing after discharge; editorships at *Commentary*. Nevertheless, I probably would never have run into him but for the magazine.

The vast, multi-layered New York intellectual and creative world of the forties and fifties had many separate territories that never abutted. The several that overlapped, in sometimes Byzantine patterns, included *Commentary*, one or two other journals, Columbia, and a few publishing houses. It included Diana and Lionel Trilling, Jacques Barzun, Mary McCarthy, Philip Rahv, William Phillips, William Barrett, Dwight Macdonald, Elliot Cohen, Nathan Glazer, Robert Warshow, Irving Kristol, Susan Sontag, Hannah Arendt, Lionel Abel, James T. Farrell, James Baldwin, Dan Wakefield, Leslie Fiedler, Steven Marcus, Norman Podhoretz, Alfred Kazin. (I set these names down as they come to mind at the moment.) I remember being surprised by the interweaving of these enclaves and persons. During a talk with Lionel Trilling, in whose seminar I was then enrolled at Columbia, I discovered that he was a friend of Elliot Cohen's. And Marjorie Nicolson, my doctoral adviser, when she saw my writing in the magazine, told me that she had been in a seminar at Yale with Cohen in the 1920s. She remembered him fondly. I doubt that Trilling and Nicolson had any idea that the other knew Cohen.

Trilling and Greenberg, a decade or so older than I, were intellectual models for me, as they were for others. They were opposites in style, Trilling magisterial in his prose and in his assessments, evoking the grandeur and sonority of Matthew Arnold and T. S. Eliot; Greenberg, stark, surgically precise, flat, lean, dry, ineluctably logical, evoking John Bunyan and Mr. Justice Brandeis. I would say, though, that their critical intention derived from the same impulse, to discern and describe with care what they concluded was the essential achievement of the serious artist, in literature or in art, and then to appraise its validity, as a kind of imperative. They seemed to me to display a Talmudic earnestness in their intensity.

(As I was completing this piece, Robert Hughes's review essay of these four volumes appeared in *The New York Review of Books*, entitled "The Medium Inquisitor." It was accompanied by a David Levine caricature, showing Clem with a skullcap, to underscore, I presume, Clem's limited inquisitorial function. Of course, the head covering might also be taken as a Talmudist's yarmulke.)

Clem's personal milieu was larger than the academic or publishing ones, including the artists and writers who hung out in the Greenwich Village studios and bars and in the Hamptons. He was very close to some of them, as we know from memoirs, romans à clef, and assorted gossip. On holiday once, after I had left New York for New Mexico, I visited him in his apartment on Central Park West and learned that the David Smith bronzes, early Jackson Pollock paintings, and other works standing around the living room had been, if I remember accurately, tokens of friendship. From time to time, Clem sold a piece for a year's income. At one time or another, he had also been close to Helen Frankenthaler, Mark Rothko, Hans Hofmann, Morris Louis, Robert Motherwell, Arshile Gorky, Kenneth Noland, Jules Olitski, among other occupants of the pantheon of contemporary art.

**Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism.* Edited by John O'Brian. University of Chicago Press.

I. *Perceptions and Judgments*, 1939–1944. Paper, $16.95.

II. *Arrogant Purpose*, 1945–1949. Paper, $16.95.

III. *Affirmations and Refusals*, 1950–1956. $29.95.

IV. *Modernism with a Vengeance*, 1959–1969. $29.95.

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Commentary, when I first joined it, had for me the ambience of an idyllic campus: no necessary body of reluctant, resistant students; no irrevocably scheduled classes; each specialist-professor-editor focused on his own concerns but actively curious, respectfully skeptical and critical, about colleagues' work; everyone impatient to engage fit audiences. The editors often worked at home. Once Clem asked his office mate, Bob Warshow, when the Jewish holidays fell. Later, Bob remarked dryly to some of us that Clem wasn't showing a new interest in observance, he just wanted to make sure he didn't come in on a day the offices were closed.

When at his desk, Clem sat hunched over, shirt sleeves rolled up, obsessively correcting text, once even rewriting the quotations from the book a contributor was reviewing. When this was pointed out to him, he shrugged, saying that well, someone should have taken care of the infelicities earlier. He got lost in his editing. One day William Phillips of *Partisan Review*, I think it was, came into the office and roused Clem, who looked up, blinking. "What are you doing here?" Phillips asked. "The Giants are in town." Clem jumped up, grabbed his jacket, and the two hurried out.

Pictures of Clem that accompany these volumes keenly remind me of his appearance years ago: face in heavy repose; bald head forward; thick sensual lips curled into what looks like a villain's smirk (perhaps because he smoked so much; he died at eighty-five, in May 1994, of emphysema); strong hooked nose; watchful eyes; in all a muscular bull of a man, calling up photographs of Picasso. I don't remember him smiling often or for more than an instant; his face rarely lightened. His ways were blunt, with no waste, but also unexpectedly, easily courteous, gentle and attentive, subduing some seething power. He didn't seem to have small talk. As Trilling was elegant in dress and manner, Clem was shaggy in both. He was generally civil, if sometimes preoccupied, without the defensive brusqueness academics cultivate, a trait Trilling displayed.

I early sensed a trace of deference in Clem toward me, out of what I took to be respect for my doctorate. I remember an assortment of stray comments we exchanged. Once I gave him an offprint of an article of mine in the *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, relating Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel* to *Paradise Lost*, which I accompanied with a deprecating murmur; he quickly replied that he much respected such work, he didn't at all dismiss it. I remember we shared an admiration, bordering on awe, for the clean writing of one or two English contributors, G. F. Hudson particularly, who regularly sent in his beautifully handwritten, perfectly legible contributions on lined paper, which we would send directly to the printer, changing only the English spellings. We once had a casual exchange about how gravely popular-fiction writers must believe in their work, agreeing, not at all superciliously, that they had to do so to do it at all, as we agreed Norman Rockwell must in his paintings for the *Saturday Evening Post* covers.

Once Clem asked me what I knew of the work of a young, then little-known poet named Frank O'Hara, who had become popular among painters; he thought he rather liked him and wanted an outside opinion. He asked me what I thought of C. P. Cavafy, who flared into fashion at one moment. From time to time, he volunteered to me the sort of advice one associates with mentors, urging me, for example, not to repeat a tricky bit of writing I had brought off, when I proposed to do so; another time he earnestly admonished me not always to take even serious matters "so seriously." At his suggestion, I expanded the critical analysis in my profile of Sam Levenson, the former high school teacher who had become an early stand-up comic. When my article appeared, I wasn't happy with my expansion, and Levenson thought it made the piece too *gedicht* (Yiddish for *thick*). Clem had earlier told me not to let others shape my judgment of my work or myself, and I suppose this was the sort of thing he meant. I note that William Barrett, one of *Partisan*'s editors when Clem was there, in his book *The Truants*, sensed a similar solicitousness on Clem's part toward him.

Clem accepted matter-of-factly my respect for his critical essays, which I tried to express casually. Occasionally I thanked him for pointing out something I simply had not seen or for articulating for me some inchoate response I sensed but could not express. We talked glancingly several times about Italian Renaissance painting. Once he said something about Giotto's flatness as opposed to deeper, later Renaissance landscapes, and I wondered, when reading Mary McCarthy on the develop-

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ment of perspective in Florentine painting, whether she might not have had a similar exchange with him. I remember a warm streak of generosity in Clem, mingled with modesty, that kept emerging incongruously through his stiffness. When I congratulated him on the appearance of *Art and Culture* (1961), his first collection, he replied that one should admire the courage of a publisher issuing a book of essays that had so little likelihood of selling.

I recall two discussions in which Clem and I differed. I thought his essay on the role of nature in modern art did not sufficiently address the phenomenon that details of nature when seen through a microscope or telescope were really forms of abstraction and could be regarded as representational only by someone who knew what they were. I have a dim memory that he was impatient with my comment. He put to me the proposition that T. S. Eliot was a greater critic than poet and would be remembered for his criticism mainly. This was before Clem wrote his elegant, eloquent essay on Eliot as critic, whose argument almost swayed me. At the time, I demurred mildly but did not offer a counter. Clem responded to my uncertainty with a respectful nod.

After I heard an anecdote involving Jascha Heifetz being pressed to evaluate a youngster's violin playing, I asked Clem whether he was ever asked to give opinions of some unknown's painting. That was the one time I can remember him being surly with me; I think he was expecting a request for such a favor. He curtly said something like he never judged work by persons he knew or who were connected with persons he knew. We collaborated on the memorial note after Bob Warshow died. After a discussion, Clem acceded to one of my changes in the final text, but when it appeared, he remarked grumpily that we should have left the original alone.

Clem was without side. He seemed shy, and I know he felt insecure, positively furtive, about his own painting. He didn't posture. I don't think I ever saw him dressed any way but casually: if he wore a tie, the top button of his shirt was open. His pants didn't seem pressed. I remember his father, who had come into the office for some reason, imploring one of the secretaries, as he left, to get Clem to dress more respectably. (Clem and his younger brother Martin, also an associate editor, looked like clones of their father.) I remember an editorial meeting in which Clem continued to leaf through his *New York Post* after the meeting had started, to Cohen's annoyance.

Clem celebrated candor, I think self-consciously and even defiantly at times. In the preface to *Art and Culture*, he wrote, in an often-quoted passage: "This book is not intended as a completely faithful record of my activity as a critic. Not only has much been altered, but much more has been left out than put in. I would not deny being one of those critics who educate themselves in public, but I see no reason why all the haste and waste involved in my self-education should be preserved in a book." His work in the current volumes, however, appears exactly as originally printed, every bit of it. If he cultivated any affectation, it was to be emphatically natural, like the renowned professors I've known from the Bronx and Brooklyn who seemed to have gone out of their way to keep their original accents.

Clem had the conviction of his enthusiasms. Barrett remarks on this in *The Truants*, speculating that Clem's reservations about William Phillips and Philip Rahv had to do with their lack "of any infectious enthusiasm unless it be calculated and measured beforehand." Clem himself pointedly acknowledged the importance of sheer feeling in responding to a work. It was perhaps exactly Clem's lack of self-doubt that so offended others. As Barrett remarked, Clem was often more certain of the intentions of artists than they were themselves.

Clem's main standard for judgment was his own immediate response, ruminated over and, if necessary, reconsidered and refined. "Kenneth Burke's critical writings," he began his review of *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, "provoke and unsettle me—at least while I actually read them—but they leave too little impression. A short time after putting Burke down, I shall have lost sight of exactly what it was that caused the excitement. My memory is no better nor worse than average, so I feel the fault must be his." After a review in the *Nation* of Mondrian's *New York Boogie Woogie*, he wrote the following postscript: "My memory played tricks when I discussed last week the new Mondrian at the Museum of Modern Art. The painting has no orange, purple, or impure colors. Seeing it again, I discovered that it was the gray which Mondrian uses here in a new way for him that made me remember his scarlet and two shades of blue as purple and impure,

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and the yellow as orange. But I have the feeling that this after-effect legitimately belongs to one's first sign of the painting. The picture improves tremendously on a second view, and perhaps after an aging of six months or so it will seem completely successful." (Clem could also confidently express exactly the opposite view. O'Brian quotes him, in a quite different context, as saying at one point: "Doesn't one find so many times that the 'full meaning' of a picture—i.e., its aesthetic fact—is, at any given visit to it, most fully revealed at the first fresh glance? And that this 'meaning' fades progressively as continued examination destroys the unity of impression?")

Inevitably Clem kept getting embroiled in controversy, but when he went into print, it was without flourish, with a laconic flatness, not caring, it seems to me, really to score a point or have the last word, although he often did both. Harold Rosenberg, the *New Yorker*'s art critic, rebuked Clem in detail for assuming an undeserved literary expertise in selecting contributions from relatively unknown poets for an issue of *Partisan Review*. He cited, in a letter to *Partisan*, the number of times Clem alluded directly or indirectly to his own criticism ("no less than 10 times on 1 3/4 pages"). Clem's response, in toto, was: "Mr. Rosenberg seems to read my stuff rather closely." The shortest item in these volumes is Clem's "Statement as Juror of an Exhibition in Oklahoma City." It is: "Man is fallible."

Clem didn't damn with faint praise so much as describe with deadly precision even what he thought was good. "One wonders how an artist so unsure of himself," he concluded of Jacques Lipchitz,

> can make such an impression of strength. This impression is not false, even if it is not supported by evidence of the courage supposed to go with that strength. What the strength, the insistence on demonstrating it, the swagger of brutality, do conceal, I believe, is Lipchitz's failure to orient himself independently in Western and modernist art. He has the superlative and inalienable power to knead matter into massive, simple, and energetic form—unlike Picasso, he has never lost his touch. What he does seem to have lost is a sure reliance upon anything inside himself.

Clem took care to keep his place, so to speak, as critic, unlike current professors who raise the significance of their role to that of their subject, sometimes above it. In his essay on Eliot's criticism, he wrote: " . . . I dare to suggest that T. S. Eliot may be the best of all literary critics. The first credentials of a critic are his taste, but to praise another's taste amounts really to saying it agrees with one's own, and therefore I would prefer not to claim that Eliot excels by his taste. I would say, rather, that he excels by his insights into the evidence of taste, and by his loyalty to the relevant."

The intricate, possibly devious, tergiversations that characterize criticism at any period may be discerned even in Clem's straightforwardness. After rebuking F. R. Leavis for intimating that Clem's own Jewishness colored his discussion of Kafka's writing ("It is distressing that Dr. Leavis should have to imply that Jewish egocentricity is what permits my esteem for Kafka's writing to survive everything I object to in it"), Clem wrote, in response to Leavis's declaration that he wouldn't have commented at all on Clem's essay on the Jewishness of Kafka if Clem hadn't brought *him*, Leavis, up in the first place: "I brought Dr. Leavis's name in because I felt it was the one that had to be mentioned if I had room for only one name. As much as I may disagree with him theoretically and practically, I happen to think Dr. Leavis the greatest, and truest, living literary critic (especially now that T. S. Eliot is in decline)." Clem surely knew of Leavis's much-diminished regard for Eliot by that time, but I doubt he was being naughty in complimenting Leavis in this particularly extravagant way. He was making his point in a literary context. The volume carries no further rejoinder from Leavis.

Although Rosenberg helped launch Clem in his early career as an art critic, Clem remains carefully objective in commenting on Rosenberg's judgments, with which he often disagreed. And Clem could be nothing less than nasty in commenting on critics he himself influenced. In his *NYR* essay, Hughes says of Greenberg:

> . . . he continues to haunt some of his former disciples, who have never gotten over the resentments of apprenticeship. Rosalind Krauss, for instance, still can't forgive him for writing off Surrealism, and for a memory like a film clip—Greenberg's writhing lips pontificating to her about "Smart Jewish girls with their typewriters"

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is replayed four or five times in her recent book, *The Optical Unconscious.*

Clem gave the impression in his writing of bringing no baggage to his confrontation with any subject. But I see now that in early pieces he expressed an almost reverential commitment to socialism. In the conclusion to "Avant Garde and Kitsch," he wrote: "Here, as in every other question today, it becomes necessary to quote Marx word for word. Today we no longer look toward socialism for a new culture—as inevitably as one will appear, once we do have socialism. Today we look to socialism simply for the preservation of whatever living culture we have right now." In later essays, we find no such adulatory references to socialism. Indeed, Clem seems to have constricted his respect for art itself. O'Brian concludes the biographical notes in volume 4 with a passage from an interview Clem gave in 1969 to the United States Information Service, in which Clem expressly puts his work in perspective: "Art shouldn't be over-rated. The quality of art in a society does not necessarily—or maybe seldom—reflect the degree of well-being enjoyed by most of its members. And well-being comes first. The weal and woe of human beings come first. I deplore the tendency to over-value art."

As I went through these volumes, I found myself disagreeing with some of Clem's minor, sometimes seemingly self-serving, positions, those that lacked what I think should be a necessary self-awareness and the humility that any critic should bring to the leavening of his inevitable, occupational arrogance.

After expressing admiration at how faithful current reproductions of paintings had become to their originals, he concluded with the pietistic admonition that, nevertheless, one should never let looking at a reproduction take the place of looking at the original. Easy for Clem to say. Anyone craning his neck to make out the Mona Lisa at the Louvre, say, behind thick glass, while standing in the midst of a milling huddle, might prefer studying in private any reasonably faithful reproduction of that work, even if reduced to the page of a coffee-table tome.

In an appreciation of Yiddish folk humor, Clem suggested that the material might with benefit be transliterated into Roman letters, as pronounced in English, for those who could not read Yiddish in its Hebrew alphabet. One might easily argue that Yiddish loses as much in transliteration as pictures do in reproduction.

And I wonder, a little mischievously, how much Clem's own vastly superior achievements in criticism over those in his own painting may have affected his elevation of Eliot's criticism over Eliot's poetry.

Clem's critical manner, in observation and expression, exemplified Matthew Arnold's deceptively simplistic rule: to see the thing as it in itself really is. Clem deplored glib formulations, contemptuously rejecting them. One can sense his groping for precision and candor in appraising a work, quite in the manner of the original creators themselves as they struggled to set down truly their visions.

In distinguishing between avant-garde art and kitsch, Greenberg stressed that the serious artist ultimately confronts the question of how he does his work as well as how he chooses its content—that is, he analyzes like a critic, with instinct if not language, even as he creates. In an exchange with Fairfield Porter, he distills this point: "Mr. Porter worries too much about what instead of how to paint." Technique itself must become a determinant for the artist in deciding on, in choosing and evaluating, his own work. Perhaps nowhere does Clem make this more clear than in his description of Pollock's working methods in a *New York Times Magazine* article, in 1961:

> When I first began to admire Pollock's painting, it was for its intensity and force; later on, it was for its clarified splendor and eloquence; right now I would praise it most for its range of mood. That range, that reach, is of a kind attainable only through the nearest contemporary thing to a truly grand style.
>
> Contrary to the prevalent impression, Pollock was already an original artist, and painted what remain some of his best works, in the four or five years before he adopted his so-called "drip" technique. Hans Hofmann had used it before he did, and Pollock resorted to this technique for much the same reason that Hofmann had: not for shock effect, but out of impatience with the facile, "artificial" edges left by the brush, the palette knife, or even the tip of the brush handle, with all that these instruments reflect of the too habitual dexterity of finger, wrist, and elbow.
>
> Pollock learned to control flung and dribbled paint almost as well as he could a brush; if accidents played any part, they were happy acci-

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dents, selected accidents, as with any painter who sets store by the effects of rapid execution.

Contrary again to the prevalent notion, Pollock often revised and retouched his paintings. He had as much capacity for self-criticism as any other artist I have known. As far as I can see, it was his own sense of a loss of authenticity in the things he did after 1952 that led him to stop painting almost entirely in the last year and a half of his life.

Serious artists, of course, in every medium, have at some point, in the very content of their mature work, confronted the issue of technique. Shakespeare incorporated a little treatise on playmaking in *Hamlet* (Eliot's "objective correlative," of course, depends on his putting Shakespeare into *Hamlet*); Milton repeatedly commented on his presence in the making of *Paradise Lost*; Beethoven has passages in major works of instruments seemingly tuning up; Pirandello's plays constitute a continuing examination of the symbiotic relation of life to theater.

What Clem recognized early, and made clear, was how the painter or sculptor wrestled with his medium. In his usual carefully generous way, Clem attributed this perception, which underpins so much of his tight analyses of an artist's work, to Hans Hofmann's lectures, only three of which he attended. Clem's criticism recognized the progression, say, that we see in Cezanne's endless paintings of the same distant promontory, which increasingly minimized verisimilitude to concentrate on those abstracted elements of landscape—mass, line, color—that ultimately command sophisticated attention. This was the point of cubism, of course, which Clem regarded so highly.

Clem gave voice to Pollock's instincts as they worked themselves out on his canvases. In this effort to provide a rationale and aesthetic for abstract expressionism, for all successful non-representational painting and sculpture, Clem was engaged in the kind of pioneering pedagogy that Huxley undertook in interpreting Darwin. From the beginning, Clem could always articulate more sharply what Pollock and his peers were doing than they themselves could.

Clem took as his province more than the plastic arts; he was as intensive a student of culture as Trilling, although he didn't range as widely. Clem wrote on contemporary poetry, Trollope, the problems of translation, and on Jewish matters, all of these less intently and frequently, of course, but with the same seriousness and directness that he brought to his art essays and reviews. He wrote on politics, too, in passing mostly and in his earliest essays, but I think he regarded all of his writing as politically rooted in some essential way.

Commentary turned out, of course, not to be the most stable workplace in those years, not altogether the utopian campus I had fantasized, and it soon manifested the sort of personnel churning common in most American universities. Cohen had gathered—with Greenberg's aid, I always assumed—editors who, for one reason or another, soon developed independent careers and reputations and went off to other pastures. After a year or so in *Commentary*'s offices, I accepted an appointment at the University of New Mexico. Nathan Glazer and Irving Kristol were gone before I joined the staff; Susan Sontag joined and left not long after me. The biographical notes in these volumes indicate that the American Jewish Committee's Publications Board, which supervises *Commentary*, "fired" Clem in 1957.

While sunning myself one afternoon in the courtyard of an adobe apartment complex in Albuquerque, I got a phone call from Midge Decter at the magazine. She told me that Cohen had committed suicide by placing a plastic bag over his head. I heard little about the magazine after that, and my sense of it got vague and jumbled. Sherry Abel, an assistant editor, visited us in the house we settled in, and we caught up on gossip. When I visited Clem in New York, we talked mostly about art. Marty Greenberg held the editorship for a while, and I wrote one or two pieces for him. When he left, Norman Podhoretz took over.

The clarity and grace of Clem's style belied the difficulty he had writing. I remember him perpetually facing blocks. Although his published essays stop in 1969, in the 1980s and 1990s he actively contributed to the editorial making of this monumental tetralogy. I think perhaps Clem simply felt by 1969 that he had said definitively and with a plenitude of evidence and demonstration what he had to say. In 1962, in reviewing *Art and Culture*, Hilton Kramer remarked on Greenberg's increasing tendency "to summarize rather than to elucidate a point of view." Clem did not always regard art criticism as an especially respectable

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activity. I suspect that he may have become less than comfortable taking on art being shaped more by pressures of sheer marketing—standards of which he himself had helped establish, with however different intent—than by meticulously exercised aesthetic judgment.

I can sum up Clement Greenberg's work only as an amateur, but allow me to quote Robert Hughes, *Time*'s art critic, who, I think, fairly crystallized the consensus of serious art historians and writers on art. He concluded his *NYR* essay: "No American art critic has produced a more imposing body of work: arrogant, clear, and forceful, a permanent rebuke to the jargon and obscurantism that bedeviled art criticism in his time and still does now. And it doesn't just 'impose'—it invites argument, all the way."

At Large

FREDERICK MORGAN

Today the sun is out full blaze
as though it means to stay.
I walk through melting slush down streets
where children shout and play,
and think: "The world has news for me—
something's at large today."

Does each day have a meaning, like
a poem's, all its own?
I'm doubtful of the simile
which seems a bit high-flown,

until I think of you, my love,
in your long skirt scrolled with flowers,
and get the message all at once:
today this world is ours.

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American Dryad

Agnes de Mille

DANIEL MARK EPSTEIN

The playwright Edward Sheldon—author of *Salvation Nell* featuring the legendary actress Minnie Fiske, and *Romance* starring Greta Garbo—lay blind and paralyzed with arthritis in his New York penthouse in 1945.

"To his couch, set high like a catafalque in the large living room above the New York skyline, came hundreds as to royalty. A hierarchic still figure, waxen and shiny-skinned, masked and blanketed in brocade, he received and counseled the creative, the searching, the ambitious, the learned. . . . To all he was first audience and discerning enthusiast: Otis Skinner, Charles MacArthur, Ruth Draper, Anne Morrow Lindbergh, Helen Hayes, Ruth Gordon, Katherine Cornell, Thornton Wilder."

Thus recalls the late Agnes de Mille, who first visited Sheldon because of his friendship to her mother. When calling upon the blind man she always wore silk, so that he would hear the rustling of the material and know she had dressed up for the occasion.

"Tell me about Martha Graham," he asked, in a sepulchral voice. "I've heard yesterday's reviews, but how does she really move?"

And without stirring a hand or foot in the dusky room, Agnes de Mille would start talking, attempting to describe in detail, and dynamically, exactly what Martha Graham had wrought.

"But what does she do with her feet in these contractions?" he demanded. "And her neck?" He insisted upon hearing precisely.

According to Agnes de Mille, this search for the mot juste to conjure up for the blind Edward Sheldon a living image of Graham, or Markova, or Alonso, was the way in which de Mille herself learned to describe dancing. It is a charming story that reduces the complex evolution of a writer to a single dramatic setting; she may even have been putting us on. Her reports to Edward Sheldon tuned a verbal instrument that was adequately seasoned, if not mellow, by the late 1940s when Agnes de Mille, already famous as the choreographer of *Oklahoma!*, started writing her first book of autobiography, *Dance to the Piper*, which begins:

> This is the story of an American dancer, a spoiled egocentric wealthy girl, who learned with difficulty to become a worker, to set and meet standards, to brace a Victorian sensibility to contemporary roughhousing, and who, with happy good fortune, participated by the side of great colleagues in a renaissance of the most ancient and magical of all the arts.

From the beginning of her writing life Agnes de Mille affected a peculiar humility. Extravagantly proud of her choreography, her amazing family, and the ancient tradition of dance, she stubbornly guarded her amateur status as an author, while producing fourteen books. The foreword to her first book continues:

> My book was neither planned nor intended. Rather it accumulated out of memoranda jotted down haphazardly, intermittently and furtively. The diffidence I felt in attempting expression in a field strange to me, and one in which the men in my family had so distinguished themselves, was understandably extreme. For years I hid what I wrote.

De Mille says the manuscript consisted of scraps of letter paper, wrapping paper, ballet programs, anything that would take the im-

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print of a pencil. "I have polished off a paragraph or two while doing a barre, a practice which I would heartily condemn in young dancers." Again she reduced the difficult business of literary composition to a fabulous, if not apocryphal image: Agnes the dancer at the barre, scribbling prose even as she perfects her plié. The resulting scraps of paper she stuffed into hatboxes until "at last, feeling the time had come for either bettering or burning," she delivered the unsorted cargo into the capable hands of her editor, Edward Weeks, at the Atlantic Monthly Press, who bought the lot. And she would have us believe that Weeks alone made literature of her jottings in the cutting room. He gets the glory, as if he had delivered the book, *Dance to the Piper*, into the world by Caesarean section.

In 1951 Agnes de Mille was the most prominent "modern" choreographer in America, having provided the movement for *Oklahoma!*, *Carousel*, and her full-length ballets *Rodeo*, *Fall River Legend*, and *Three Virgins and a Devil*. The American public rewards expertise and hasn't much patience with the multi-talented. Only the specialist deserves our undivided attention, particularly in the arts. The dance director who writes imposing books is suspect not only as a dilettante writer but as a distracted choreographer. De Mille was a major choreographer who would not risk being regarded as a dilettante, so she has played down her writing. If her works were not so transparently autobiographical, it is almost certain she would have offered them to the public in demure anonymity.

Her mother, Anna Angela George, was the daughter of the economist Henry George, the most illustrious American intellectual of his day. His "single tax" theory, that land alone should be taxed, had worldwide influence. Long after his death in 1897, de Mille recalls, Henry George's disciples made pilgrimages to pay their respects to his daughter Anna. She and her daughters attended conferences of the Georgists, as they were called, as far away as London, where Agnes recalls being treated with the awe and reverence owed to royalty.

Agnes de Mille's father, William, was the son of playwright Henry de Mille, David Belasco's first collaborator. Henry died of typhoid at age thirty-nine, leaving his Jewish wife, Beatrice, to care for their two sons. She made ends meet by improvising a career as the second American female play broker. Her son William, at twenty-five, wrote a Broadway hit, followed by several more in quick succession. His younger brother, who had nothing but bad luck in the New York theater, went to Hollywood, where he became Cecil B. DeMille.

It is not surprising that, coming from this family, Agnes de Mille would be impelled to perform onstage or write serious books—or that, as a woman, she should also feel daunted by either prospect. In the de Mille home, the women did—along with childbearing—the physical work, housekeeping, and cooking; men worked with their minds. Yet Agnes's childhood ambition to become a dancer was so repugnant to the Victorian family that they praised her intellect, hoping she might give up the dance for a literary career.

Anna de Mille was frugal, strict, and austere in everything from dress to time management. She had no understanding of, or patience with, pure aesthetics: "She could not permit herself to do anything pleasant unless she felt she was doing it for someone else's sake. I have known her to eat a bunch of grapes over a period of days and never have a sound one, keeping exact pace with the mold." This was not the sort of sensibility that would support her daughter's theatrical ambition; no more was Agnes's father's. "My father," she wrote, "considered dancing at best exhibitionistic acrobatics, and certainly a field that offered neither intellectual nor spiritual challenge."

Her parents would never have enrolled Agnes in a ballet class except that her sister's arches collapsed, "providentially." The orthopedist advised ballet dancing. Thirteen-year-old Agnes was sent to accompany her younger sister Margaret to the Kosloff School of Imperial Russian Ballet. Theodore Kosloff told Agnes that her knees were weak, her spine curved, she was too heavy for her age, and her "muscles were dry, stubborn and unresilient." He said she was a bit old to start training, at thirteen.

With these words ringing in her ears, Agnes began the arduous task of making her dancer's body, the task that every ballerina must undertake regardless of age or natural aptitude, the labor that she has described from the inside out as no dancer has ever done.

I bent to the discipline. I learned to relax with my head between my knees when I felt sick or

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faint. I learned how to rest my insteps by lying on my back with my feet vertically up against the wall. I learned how to bind up my toes so that they would not bleed through the satin shoes. But I never sat down. I learned the first and all-important dictate of ballet dancing—never to miss the daily practice.

I seemed, however to have little aptitude for the business. . . . I strained and strained. Nothing perceptible happened. A terrible sense of frustration drove me to striving with masochistic frenzy.

Ballet technique is arbitrary and very difficult. It never becomes easy; it becomes possible. . . . Unless a certain satisfaction is derived from the disciplining and punishing, the pace could not be maintained. Most dancers are to an extent masochists.

Most dancers are to an extent masochists. In the post-Freudian theater, this is now an *idée reçue.* But in 1951, Agnes de Mille's stark confession of the dark side of the dancer's psyche was shocking. In a chapter called "Ballet and Sex," from *Dance to the Piper,* she calls dancing a complete if unconscious substitute for physical love, observing that in the lives of most famous dancers it usually assumes this function. Great dancing is essentially erotic, but for the moment of exhibitionistic glory the dancer "pays dearly. . . . She is forced to relinquish her unique womanly power: her grasp of reality. She is rooted in air. The fruit of her womb is gestures. Dedicating her life to her own body, she sacrifices the reality of her children's bodies and in effect that of her husband's."

Everything about modern dance might seem shocking to the children of Victorians. They wanted to regard the ballerina as the idealization of all that was pure and estimable in the physical woman. In a half century things had changed very fast, first with Isadora Duncan dancing barefoot in a nightgown, and then Martha Graham's maenads celebrating god-knows-what indecencies, rolling around on the stage. And now the most articulate voice of the modern movement, our foremost dance historian, announced to the world what they already feared: that ballet, the epitome of human lightness and ease of movement, was actually founded upon a painful and even vulgar discipline rooted in sweat and blood and dark, distinctly un-Christian impulses.

In *Dance to the Piper,* de Mille told how she became a dancer against the odds, against her parents' and teachers' advice, her classmates' scorn—against, indeed, her own body. At the Kosloff school she excelled in nothing but mime, where her genius for comedy was, from the first, undeniable. Mime is the purest evidence of that kinetic memory which is essential to choreography as well as dance criticism. But de Mille wanted nothing less than to be a prima ballerina. Discouraged, at sixteen she hung up her ballet shoes. She enrolled at UCLA, to the relief of everyone in her family. There her talent for writing and scholarship was immediately recognized and praised as her dancing had never been. Yet in her sophomore year she was invited to dance some bergerettes in a college revue; the applause was pleasing, and this performance led to others. Although she graduated from the university with academic honors, de Mille had made up her mind to go on the stage after all.

After fifteen years of struggle at the barre, in audition studios and on stages in New York, Paris, and Brussels, Agnes de Mille succeeded beyond anyone's wildest expectations. Then, in the late forties, she warily began her career as a writer, proposing to explain the mysteries of dancing to herself and the public.

She was what we might call an "odd Brahman," the wealthy, well-educated granddaughter of Jewish immigrants, English intellectuals, and theater gypsies. De Mille wintered in New York and summered in the Catskills, until Hollywood beckoned her father in 1914. There she went to school with Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., and Joel McCrea, and the children of Louis B. Mayer. Charlie Chaplin and Fairbanks, Sr., came to dinner. Geraldine Farrar sang in her parlor and played their piano. Agnes was showbiz aristocracy, like Eugene O'Neill and Cornelia Otis Skinner and the Barrymores. Like her father and grandfather, she might be capable of anything, any outrage against the status quo in art and letters, notwithstanding the limitation of being born a girl-child in 1905—the daughter of a proper Victorian mother.

Anna de Mille had a program for Agnes. "She wanted me above all to be a fine, gentle, sweet-mannered, pure girl and this was what I was being raised as against every inclination in my nature."

What, exactly, was Agnes de Mille's nature? As it emerges in her more intimate writings,

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her character is a distillation of certain virtues more familiar to us from pagan sources, Greek and Roman, than from any Christian paradigm—ferocious strength, sexual candor, and mystical intuition. It is fitting that her name has become linked with her colleague Martha Graham's. These distinctly different personalities shared a primitive vigor, even a savagery, that expressed itself in defiant images. As dancers they may have appeared onstage as angels of the erotic imagination—but both were angels with claws. Capable of great generosity, they never put kindness before self-protection or liberty. De Mille was bold in the exposition of her most primitive impulses. "My little sister Meg would get in my way," she said mischievously. "I used to *strangle* her!"

Great novelists have many stories to tell; the author of significant autobiography—a Jane Addams, an Anne Frank or an Agnes de Mille—has a single story, even a single episode or incident so resonant that the larger culture adopts it. The tale becomes a chapter of collective memory, an essential part of understanding ourselves.

Agnes de Mille's theme, as it evolves in her most intimate autobiographies, is the loss of innocence. Her central story is the tragedy of a late Victorian marriage, her parents' marriage. In her autobiographical novel *Where The Wings Grow* (1978), she describes how her parents strolled together hand in hand through the forest of Merriewold where they had their summer home.

> That mother and father were in love I knew as I knew that the woods were green and budding. . . . The whole forest quickened for me. The world thrilled. Everything was beginning and good, free summer lay ahead. . . . Mother and Father loved absolutely. This was the meaning of the place, of Merriewold.

She was then seven. Her father was a famous playwright, a dapper, witty young man with a mustache and the profile of a Spanish grandee. He wrote plays in a shack in the woods, and played tennis, while his beautiful wife, Anna, ran the household and took care of the children. Life seemed perfect.

Ten years later the marriage fell apart. What had happened? In Hollywood, among starlets, where "all the men with power in the studio had whatever they wanted," the handsome young playwright discovered sex. This is the phrase de Mille uses, repeatedly. "Father discovered sex," an exercise his Victorian wife had been taught to endure without pleasure. Agnes blames her father, a kind and otherwise civilized man, for what she inferred was a brutal initiation in the marriage bed. She blames her mother for her inexorable rage upon learning of his infidelities. "From the morning she walked out of Father's home she never spoke to him again."

Let the blame fall where it may, it was, in de Mille's view, sexual ignorance that killed the marriage: Victorian naïveté on the one side and Victorian brutality and concupiscence on the other. For their adolescent daughter, this was the fall from paradise. She entered a period of mourning from which she did not wholly recover until twenty years later, when she married the man of her dreams and took him to Merriewold, where they lay down happily in Mother and Father's bed.

Agnes de Mille tells this story several times. She tells it obliquely in *Dance to the Piper* (published when her parents were still living). She tells it quite frankly in an essay called "The de Milles" in the 1990 collection of essays and stories called *Portrait Gallery*. She tells it lyrically, passionately, in *Where the Wings Grow*, a book she dictated into a tape recorder while recovering from the stroke that paralyzed the right half of her body. She describes her long illness in another autobiographical novel, *Reprieve*. De Mille learned to write with her left hand in order to revise the paragraphs someone else had transcribed from the tape.

"That book saved my life," she says of *Where the Wings Grow*. It is her central autobiographical text. The first part is a rhapsodic memory of early childhood, the beauty of nature and her parents' bond, and her love for her cousin Elizabeth, who was five years older. The second part is a third-person narrative of the tragic history of their neighbors (relatives by marriage), the Takamines. Dr. Takamine, who discovered the formula for synthetic adrenaline, was one of the first Japanese in America to marry a white woman, Caroline Hitch of New Orleans. They lived like royalty in Merriewold, their bliss threatened only by the sin that divided the de Milles—adultery. This theme links the second section of the book to the third and last, in which de Mille narrates her return to Merriewold as an adolescent, her disillusionment, despair, and eventual healing.

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At nine, Agnes left the East for California. During the years in California, far away from Merriewold and her beloved cousin Elizabeth, Agnes romanticized the forest and developed a long-distance, pre-erotic crush on her cousin. Agnes had set herself up for disappointment upon her return to Merriewold: Elizabeth, now sixteen, had turned the corner and become a woman, more interested in her young men than in communing with this adoring little girl, who had such peculiar impulses:

> I longed suddenly, overwhelmingly to go to the deer's running ground, to see those floral groves. . . . I had only once dared to go there since coming back, for down there waited my young mother, young and in love with a beloved husband. But now if I went back, I felt I would find my own life, not my mother's. And if I had a companion I could seal the moment. . . . I wanted Elizabeth to go with me into the woods.

But Elizabeth is on the back porch in the moonlight, with her young man, Jim. Approached by the little girl with her queer invitation, Elizabeth is at first politely solicitous, then perplexed. At last she becomes angered by the child's persistence. "You've been hanging around my neck all summer and I don't like it," she says. "Now let go of my dress, do you understand? I don't like it."

The effect is devastating. For Agnes this rejection by her idol, Elizabeth, following her parents' divorce, spells the end of childhood—the end of innocence. "It was finished. The woods were finished. It was all stale. Mother's young love, her impossible young love, over. The woods were emptied. The wilderness had become cement streets. It was all cement, it was finished."

The rest of Agnes de Mille's creative life will be consecrated to redemption, mourning the fall from paradise and filling the empty space with Art—clear images of a new and more vital woman. Her fresh choreography, linking earth and sky, the rich humor of the dance movement as well as the literary prose, is devoted to healing the psychic wound described in *Where the Wings Grow*. Identifying her parents' love with the forest, confounding her own innocence with her parents' harmony, completes the equation of valuables to be wrecked by Victorian ignorance of sex and nature's sacredness.

When she was a little girl, says Agnes de Mille, she knew all the trees of Merriewold as persons. Every time the woodcutters felled one of the trees with an ax, Agnes de Mille would carry on so, weeping and crying out loud, that her parents must have thought she was possessed. And one might say she was possessed, with the spirit of the forest. "I was impossible. . . . And at the same time I was the mysterious child, powerful and beautiful. I was the possible lover. When I stood in the woods alone, as I did with increasing frequency, I was capable of passion. It was the age of great heroines. I knew all sensitivity, all awareness, all terrible blinding curiosity." She had long thick hair, bright red, and eyes the color of the clear sky. She had a muscular little body taut with explosive energy, and tiny quick feet. Agnes de Mille is our quintessential American dryad, celebrating the marriage of earth and sky in the arboreal image of the dancer, mourning the death of the forests.

For all its lyric beauty and thematic drive, *Where the Wings Grow* remains unfinished. The three parts of the narrative do not quite cohere. There is too much of the Takamines and not enough continuity to the story of Agnes and her cousin Elizabeth; there is a rush to fill in the happy ending, after so much anguish. The strict vision of form that shaped her choreography in *Rodeo* and the dream ballet in *Oklahoma!*, and commands her individual sentences, somehow failed her in the planning of a book that might have been a masterpiece. Nevertheless the reader finds in it the key story of Agnes de Mille's life, the roots of the sensibility that enabled her to create her incomparable portraits of dancers.

Literary portraiture is a rare sub-genre of biography, or fiction, depending upon one's definition of these illusive terms. The writing of portraits requires great verbal concision and understanding of the subject in order to render a character precisely in the fewest pages.

Agnes de Mille's portraits of the great dancers, from Isadora Duncan and Anna Pavlova to Martha Graham and Alicia Alonso, are perfect examples of the form. De Mille's visual memory, which is the choreographer's chief resource, encompasses the whole repertory of modern dance and classical ballet. Conversing in her eighties, when I knew her, she could evoke with a gesture and a phrase the distinct

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mood of an obscure Graham solo no one alive can recollect. No one had seen dancers as Agnes de Mille had seen them, and no one else had the verbal acuity to recount the movement or the spirit that cannot be recorded on film.

Before our dazzled eyes she flashed with the sudden sweetness of a hummingbird in action too quick for understanding by our gross utilitarian standards. . . . Her trunk was small and stripped of all anatomy but the ciphers of adolescence, her arms and legs relatively long, the neck extraordinarily long and mobile. All her gestures were liquid and possessed of an inner rhythm that flowed to inevitable completion with the finality of architecture or music. Her arms seemed to lift not from the elbow or the arm socket, but from the base of the spine. Her legs seemed to function from the waist. When she bent her head her whole spine moved and the motion was completed the length of the arm through the elongation of her slender hand and the quivering reaching fingers. (Pavlova: From *Dance to the Piper*)

Her foot was long for her height, but very slender, strongly arched and as delicate as a bird's claw. On the end of this delicate parenthesis she alighted and hung poised like the crescent moon, a stillness in the movement of time.

The dark lashes rested tranquilly against the wax-pale cheek, a Mona Lisa smile was fixed on the noncommittal lips until she suddenly glanced up in childlike wickedness and chuckled with a tiny sound like something very valuable breaking. Always about her there was an aroma of sadness, a hint of death in the moment of consummated effort. This was her Jewish heritage, as it was Anna Pavlova's. (Alicia Markova: From *Portrait Gallery*)

Her hair is black and straight as a horse's tail. Her voice is low, dark and rusky, clear and bodyless like most dancers'. Her speech—who shall describe Martha's speech? The breathless, halting search for the releasing word as she instructs a student. . . . The gentle "You see it should be like this," as her body contracts with lightning, plummets to the earth and strikes stars out of the floor. "Now you try it. *You* can do it." Thus Diana to the rat catchers. (Martha Graham: From *Dance to the Piper*)

The most salient strength of the portraits is this physical specificity; but beyond the physical, they are also profound, soul-searching. After reviewing Alicia Markova's life in a few pages, her birth to a Catholic Irishwoman and a Jewish engineer, his death when Alicia was thirteen, her training under a tyrannical ballet mistress—de Mille sets about to explain Markova's aloofness, mystery, and unworldliness:

From the time she was eight she was treated as someone apart, a conditioning usually reserved for young lamas or queen bees. . . . The girl who did exactly as she was told for over twenty years, who remained as passive as a baby, as cherished, as self absorbed, grew to be the perfect instrument for more aggressive forces—but herself initiated nothing.

De Mille knew Alicia Markova, as she has known most of her subjects. And her observations do not stop at the door to the dressing room:

I have seen Alicia stripped. She had no body at all. She had no bust, no stomach, no hips, no buttocks; she had two long supple arms and two long strong legs, joined by a device that contained in the most compact manner possible enough viscera to keep her locomotive. She was utterly feminine but incorporeal as a dryad. Her slenderness, her lack of unneeded flesh was a rebuke to everything gross in the world.

De Mille explains that the great Markova never married, was never even engaged. She was never interested in anything but becoming the greatest ballerina in the world, which she accomplished at great emotional cost. De Mille sums up this devil's bargain in the epigrammatic phrase: "Outraged nature must have backed up on her from time to time and taken blackmail payments."

The conflict between nature and artifice rages from the beginning to the end of de Mille's monumental portrait of Martha Graham, published in 1991, after the subject's death. Paradoxically, Graham freed the dancer from one form of artifice, classical ballet technique, only to replace it with a technique even more punishing to the dancer's body.

Ballet had long denied the woman's sexual center of gravity, her connection with the earth, and the religious nature of this connection. It was Graham's inspiration to reclaim this. In her famous essay "Ballet and Sex," Agnes de Mille blames the decline of dance since the first millennium on the Christian Church. "For one thousand years there has

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been no dancing in the Christian religion and it is the only great religion that has had none. It is obvious why—a religion that is based on the mortification of the flesh is not going to find the flesh and its attendant heats a suitable medium of expression." De Mille shows us how Martha Graham's enterprise, her technique, her school, and the great dance dramas, took on the ultimate seriousness of a new religion, with Graham herself as high priestess.

In her acknowledgments, de Mille states that the writing of *Martha* took between twenty and twenty-five years. Actually she had been writing about Graham since the 1940s. In *Dance to the Piper,* Graham has a fifteen-page chapter all to herself, and in the 1958 sequel to de Mille's autobiography, *And Promenade Home,* there are several flattering paragraphs about the great innovator. Graham had been like an older sister to de Mille since the 1930s. When an editor at Random House in the 1960s proposed the idea of a biography of Graham by de Mille, it was with the sense of a *fait accompli.* The book virtually existed, in Agnes de Mille's memories and impressions, like a powerful secret that cannot be kept. It was inevitable, if the author outlived her subject, and found the narrative strength, that the book would emerge. *Martha* would be not only the story of the greatest modern dancer, but the epic of modern dance in America.

Martha Graham alive had been feted, worshipped, and feared; alive she seemed to have superhuman powers of self-protection, even of vengeance if crossed. She was surely the greatest dancer America has produced. But she was also furious, refractory, impossible—the gossip about her in later life was outrageous. Who could sort it all out? I have myself repeatedly heard the tale of the time Miss Graham, impatient with a student's careless execution of a contraction, grabbed her from behind by the shoulders, put her knee in the small of the woman's back, and broke it. True or not, the anecdote conveys the incidental ruthlessness in dealing with students, performers, and patrons that has a real source in the facts. No one alive knew the facts as did Agnes de Mille, who, late in life estranged from Graham, was known to speak her mind.

"This is the story of a genius," de Mille's book on Graham begins, "a woman who made a greater change in her art . . . than almost any other single artist who comes readily to mind." Having gotten this judgment out of the way, de Mille explains her problem: "Martha always wanted to leave behind a legend, not a biography. To this end she deliberately and industriously made the way of any biographer difficult. She destroyed personal documents, letters, records. . . . The past was to be obliterated and reshaped according to Martha's will." De Mille's main sources were her interviews with company members and her own prodigious memory.

Strictly speaking, the portrait is more of a memoir than a standard biography.

I knew Martha mainly as an adoring younger sister might, and worshipped her surprising and authentic gifts. I came to lean on her strength and often in the early days of our friendship begged her opinion after each of my own concerts. . . . She was kind and helpful, and not just on professional matters.

I can, I believe, indicate the forces and demons that drove this small, bewitching creature to her unmatched achievement. And I can portray her life and achievement in the context of the history of dance.

This is not a modest or scholarly claim, but an announcement that the book is intended to be a work of art.

Martha opens, novelistically, in the narrative voice of the "younger sister" Agnes. She recalls her first impressions of Martha Graham seated beside her lover, the portly pianist Louis Horst, at dance concerts in the late 1920s. De Mille had gotten to know Horst earlier, as they traveled together for the Ballet Intime. In an opening scene, de Mille humorously recalls: "One night, conversationally, and without warning, Louis dragged me by the hair of my head right into the privacy of his bed." His bed was the lower berth of a rattling Pullman en route to Chicago.

That day Horst was suffering from a lover's quarrel with Graham. He poured out his soul to the wide-eyed young de Mille. Flattered by the older man's confidence in her, she accepted the role of confessor, but not without a sense of shame. Horst was married. Martha had left him and gone to another man's bed, because Horst would not leave his wife. Young Agnes, still very much the Victorian mother's child caught up in these bohemian intrigues,

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was shocked. Her relationship with the pianist helps to define the narrative point of view.

In time Horst introduced Agnes to Martha, a meeting the younger woman approached warily. "There she was, small, dark, practically famous, the basilisk, the femme fatale. . . . Whew! And there I was, our Edwardian girl, totally without worldly experience and cocooned still in my mother's nursery of cambric tea and childish civilities." De Mille stands on the threshold of the modern experience and its "contemporary roughhousing." It looks as if the leader of the orgy is going to be this mysterious femme fatale, with her "grave sweet dignity, her absolute fastidiousness of manner and speech." Every inch a lady, Miss Graham is about to shatter the image of Victorian femininity forever.

The narrator digresses briefly, backing and filling. Information about Graham's childhood is meager, the stuff of press releases: "a sixth generation American with a line of Scotch-Irish antecedents on both sides. . . . There was money in her background." Her father was a doctor who specialized in mental disorders. She grew up in Santa Barbara, one of three sisters. De Mille hurries on to 1916, when Graham studied with Ruth St. Denis, and devotes fifty pages to the movement that spawned Graham's technique, the lives and work of Isadora Duncan, Ted Shawn, and Ruth St. Denis. De Mille's portrait of the odd couple that came to be known as Denishawn—ethereal Miss Ruth and her androgynous husband, the narcissistic poseur Ted Shawn, is a marvelous balance of humor and informed respect for dance pioneers who made a virtue of eccentricity. Their technique she describes as pseudo-ballet, pseudo-Duncan, and pseudo-Oriental, but with a pith of seriousness, "the centering of concentration and personality of one's highest instincts before proceeding into any exercise."

The story of Shawn and St. Denis, thorough history in itself, is a mini-drama that earns its place in the larger narrative, which is about Martha Graham, modern dance, and sex. It locates young Martha in the current of innovation, while it telegraphs a crucial feature of de Mille's method:

> In her autobiography, Ruth stresses that they (Ruth and Ted) were lovers. We will never know for certain, but it matters, because both of their lives were warped by their relationship and by the overpowering effort of trying to conform to the regular marital pattern of Western Christianity. Miss Ruth was a devout Christian Scientist. Ted was an avid hedonist and a deep-rooted homosexual.

Ruth, de Mille adds, was very likely frigid. None of this does she offer by way of pandering to gross appetites for gossip. *It matters*, says de Mille flatly, because dance is an expression of sexuality. The sex of these great dancers is fate, the way character is fate. And we are not likely to understand the character of the great choreographer without some insight into her sexual disposition.

The next two hundred pages of *Martha*, the heart of the epic, is given to Graham's rise to fame, the creation of the technique that bears her name, and the great dance dramas. In 1926 Graham quit her job in the Greenwich Village Follies. With a small income from teaching, she opened her own studio on the sixth floor of Carnegie Hall and began experimenting, in her own movement variations, "studies of pure movement, the very essence of emotion."

De Mille never loses sight of the private personality which is the source of Graham's prodigious output.

> She was in love with an older man who was married and who was trying to free himself. . . . She was working in constant crisis, she attempted daily to maintain her aplomb, to show love, to receive love.

But it was impossible with Horst. Indeed, giving and receiving love will be difficult for Graham, until it becomes impossible. Martha Graham emerges from the de Mille portrait as a classical heroine whose preternatural power forces her into isolation.

> Martha stood for the outraged individual. She was herself a hurt girl, lonely and probably frightened. She advocated free love, though she wanted marriage. . . . Her dancing grew ever more fierce, bound up, iron. . . . She would break opposition. She developed a technique of hitting out and hitting in. The movement was rock hewn.

The force of her personality was so great that her dancers became slaves rather than collaborators. In de Mille's language, the sado-masochism of the rehearsal process is unmis-

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takable. The life-giving, revolutionary Graham technique, which focused attention on the torso, and "stripped off the chassis of the body and exposed the motor," was painful and taxing. "All of it was hard to do and punishing to the girls' bodies . . . the constant pelvic drive, the hammering of the organs." This is not to mention the insane floor exercises, such as walking for hours on one's knees, which was so damaging to dancers' legs that no one, except under Martha's lash, could ever be forced to make the sacrifice.

> She began to realize that she could rule, she could create a mystical relationship with an audience or, alternatively, that she could destroy. She had power. She grew to love the magic word: Power.

Power brought Martha Graham fame and glory, as the press discovered her at last, the intellectual audience, and patrons such as Bethsabee de Rothschild. In 1936 she met the dancer Eric Hawkins, fifteen years her junior. She invited him to join the company. He inspired her to create roles for the male dancer, and erotic pas de deux. She fell in love with Hawkins, and he became an obsession. "It was plain to the girls and even to Martha herself that Eric's brutality stirred something in her." He began to dominate the notorious *dominatrice.* De Mille says that the effect upon Graham was basically humanizing, making her vulnerable to affection; but the lovers' violence was such that their erotic connection could never evolve into conjugal generosity or harmony—it was a constant battle of wills.

Graham used to call herself "doom-driven." Eric was her doom. Their long affair is the turning point of the tragedy. Married in 1948, the two immediately began to destroy each other. She was the greater artist, and would rule him onstage; but as a younger man he could manipulate her emotionally, "praising the younger girls, the pretty ones." The relationship, born in erotic passion, ended in physical violence.

She was fifty. Martha Graham would live for another forty years after her failed marriage, years of artistic growth and public triumph. But those who knew her watched helplessly as the lonely woman descended into alcoholism, suicidal depression, paranoia, and isolation unrelieved by her growing coterie of sycophants. Without ever forgetting or ceasing to love the younger Graham, who had been a true friend and had given so much to her and to others, de Mille frankly describes the great woman's descent.

Humorous, proud, humble, and angry by turns, de Mille in this book never loses her sense of wonder about her subject. She begins in the voice of the adoring younger sister and ends in the elegiac tone of maternal pathos. Recalling her final visits with the artist, de Mille writes:

> She did not inquire about my life. . . . As I left the remote encounter with this pale, lustrous deity, I was remembering the exuberant, giggling young woman who had poked her umbrella through the shattered roof of my old jalopy and sheltered me. . . . Martha was now alone. She was going to die alone, as she had lived alone, without children . . . lover or a husband, without, God help us, old friends. She would remain alone with her work, the alter self, the presence, the aureole—penumbra which overshadowed her life.

Graham's isolation stands in contrast to the understated subplot, the romance of de Mille's own life. The "younger sister" de Mille has been happily married for forty years to a man Graham introduced to her. Perhaps de Mille has been able to have it both ways, as a successful choreographer and as a married woman and mother, because the "older sister" has blazed the path for her.

Agnes de Mille has said that she could not have succeeded as a choreographer without the example and encouragement of Martha Graham. In writing *Martha,* she paid off the debt with interest. It seems unlikely that Martha Graham will ever get a more sympathetic hearing from any biographer whose word will be credited. There are many ways to misunderstand Graham, the *monstre sacre,* as many as there are people who worked for her. But perhaps there is only one way properly to understand her—as a strong-willed dancer very like Agnes de Mille, an angel with claws, determined to destroy that nineteenth-century icon, the good Christian ballerina, and put something vital in its place.

The most perfect of the de Mille portraits, however, are the miniatures to be found in the collection called *Portrait Gallery.* Here the genre distinction between lyric prose and fiction becomes irrelevant. Along with the por-

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traits of dancers, theater impresarios, Billy Rose and Sol Hurok, and the de Mille brothers, there are two autobiographical pieces so dramatically plotted and thematically resonant that they remind one of the short stories of Eudora Welty. One is the story "Allie: All For Love." This concerns de Mille's maiden aunt, a kindly Victorian lady whose pathetic naïveté about love and sex actually leads to her death, just as young Agnes herself is enjoying the adventure of her first love affair. It is an elegant presentation of the central de Mille theme. The other story, called "Avoir du Crain" is a horror story, about a female servant, a *monstre* that de Mille takes into her household. The cook is so selfish and cruel that she makes life miserable for the de Mille family, yet she exerts a strange power—de Mille cannot bring herself to fire the woman until she has nearly wrecked the family. Here we see one of the themes from *Martha* in a more personal form: the evil cook represents a part of the new woman antipathetic to family life, whose ferocity must be endured as a penance until we have learned what we have to learn from her.

On the Lower East Side of Manhattan, Agnes de Mille lived in the spacious, bright apartment she shared with Walter Prude, her husband of fifty years. He died in 1990. The stroke of 1977 confined de Mille, mostly, to the bedroom where she worked and received visitors. She sat erect on the queen-sized bed, under a lapboard strewn with papers and pens, an island of erudition in a sea of books, notes, and manuscripts. Books were piled on the bed, on the windowsill, around the room. On the bureau were photographs of her late husband, her son, a professor of history at a university, and photographs of Merriewold.

She entertained graciously, serving tea in rare china, her eyes vivid blue and piercing, her wit fresh and irrepressible. Her silver hair was pulled straight back from her face. Her hand, the right hand with no feeling, blundered against the teacup and was splashed by the scalding beverage. When her visitor expressed alarm, she tossed her head, turning up her chin, flashed the famous, haughty profile: "More concern for the *teacup*, dearie!" Questioned about her grandfather, the economist Henry George, she rummaged through a pile of books, plucking out George's collected essays, dog-eared, the book spine bulging with de Mille's notepapers. "Now you don't want to get me on *that* subject." One of the world's experts on her grandfather's theories, she was at the time in the thick of correspondence with a perplexed Georgist.

She asked me if I had read the new biography of poet Anne Sexton, holding it high. "The woman had no self-control, no self-respect," she said, with impatience, deflating all sympathy, tossing the book aside. She picked up Lytton Strachey's famous biography of Queen Victoria. "I've been rereading this," she says. "Another sort of woman altogether." From Queen Victoria to the confessional poet Sexton might seem an overwhelming transition; for de Mille it was merely another opportunity to marvel at human nature, to find yet more humor and pathos in human "progress."

At eighty-seven she was still writing, working on a new book of portraits. While her dances continue to be revived, many of her books are out of print. Dance is the most evanescent of the arts, as it is the most passionately rooted in the present moment. Literature, the most enduring of the arts, rises above the moment, with a view to posterity, upon eternity. That one woman possessed genius in these two disparate mediums seems almost a freak of nature. De Mille's stories of dancers, her brilliant choreography, elegant in itself and expressive of changes in sexuality, are vital literature, and will long endure to remind us of this modern master, who died, after a life of continuous achievement, in 1993.

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Closest to Home

NORBERT KRAPF

One summer shy of fifty
I watch the bell flower
of the columbine
spill midnight blue
onto the ground
and shadow slant
across the bronze
of the sundial
balanced on the base
of a birdbath.

I hear a cardinal
dart metallic notes
from a nest high
in the privet hedge
below which my son
and his friend
build a network
of bridges and tunnels
in the sandbox.

As I spray water
into a bed of lilies
the sun stops warming
the back of my neck,
evening breezes stir,
and I hear, through
screens, my daughter
play a Vivaldi adagio
on my grandfather's violin.

One summer shy of fifty
I resolve to cultivate
that which I love
closest to home.

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The Wasp Leaves the Bottle

Charles Sanders Peirce

JOSIAH LEE AUSPITZ

In 1982, a review of the first two volumes of the new chronological edition of the Peirce papers noted that at Peirce's alma mater, Harvard, his name had appeared in the catalogue of philosophy courses only once in the previous five years, buried in fine print with the usual clutch of "American pragmatists." During the same period, two courses a year were usually devoted to the work of Wittgenstein, early and late.

In the intervening decade, the canon has changed little with respect to Wittgenstein, who in 1993 shared with Plato, Aristotle, Kant, and Hegel the distinction of being twice featured in the titles of Harvard philosophy courses. But Peirce is inching up. And when his name, too, at last breaks into the bold print of American university course catalogues, that outcome will owe much to the long-term institutional support evident in the volumes and series listed at the end of this essay.

Three of the books contain selections that introduce Peirce to serious students of philosophy (joining similar anthologies published in the past decade in German, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Romanian, and Spanish). Another three are scholarly editions of Peirce's writings, by theme and chronology. Five more collect by topic some of the three hundred essays from the 1989 Peirce Sesquicentennial Congress, at which world-renowned professors lent their luster to the devoted scholars who, working in unfashionable places, have been the mainstay of the Peirce revival.

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Finally, there are three secondary works of more general interest—the first full-length biography, a recent paperback edition of the best introductory survey, and a collection of historical essays setting Peirce in his nineteenth-century context—and a selection of six monographs from the more than forty book-length titles of the past seven years.

In all, the expanding bookshelf gives evidence that Peircean studies have completed an important decade in a growing movement of rediscovery. Taken together, the materials go far to establish Charles Sanders Peirce as the classic American philosopher—a difficult, ranging, and rigorous philosophical mind, as important as any that the English-speaking world has produced.

The point, moreover, at which Peirce diverges radically from the more celebrated Wittgenstein may now be working to Peirce's advantage. Wittgenstein posed the issue in the opening pages of his *Blue Book*, a collection of his lecture notes from the early 1930s. Here he departed from his usually restrained style to disparage the "craving for generality" that, as he saw it, had led philosophy astray. His disdain set a cleansing tone of scrupulous modesty in an age of ideological excess. It seemed to his followers to be vindicated in a new departure—the case method, focused not on metaphysical isms but on the minutious examination of both ordinary language and the "language games" that shape experience:

> If we say thinking is essentially operating with signs, the first question you might ask is: "What are signs?"—Instead of giving any kind of *general* answer to this question, I shall propose to you to look closely at *particular cases* which we should call "operating with signs." (My italics)

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Peirce, by contrast, tackled the question "What are signs?" head on, not because he was less fastidious than Wittgenstein in his craving for generality, but because his was a mind of greater speculative power. More rigorously trained than Wittgenstein as both mathematician and experimental scientist, and incomparably better read in the history of logic and philosophy, Peirce saw the case method as posing a problem for signs *in general.*

To recognize something as a case, an instance, always raised the question "a case of what?" As Peirce saw it, any sign can be viewed simultaneously in both general and particular aspects. His distinction between "token" and "type" went to the heart of the problem. (The young Cambridge logician F. P. Ramsey had in fact commended it to Wittgenstein in a 1923 review of the *Tractatus*). A mark on a piece of paper may be viewed both as a physical inscription (and as such a particular instance or "token") and as a representation of more general attributes shared by any inscription of that "type." Further, the token-type distinction, now canonical among logicians, is but a partial rendering of one of many triadic divisions in a ramified theory of signs that Peirce developed from the mid-1860s until his death in 1914.

For Peirce actual signs are never univocal. It is in their general character that they may be construed variably and analyzed modally. Of Peirce's own divisions, icon-index-symbol is the most commonly used. Santayana took it up the moment he heard Peirce expound it, and the linguist Roman Jakobson, when he came upon it in late career, saw it as opening "new, urgent and far-reaching vistas to the science of language." In a computer age we are quick to see it as a modal classification with no pure referents in everyday experience.

Thus, as a portrait, Gainsborough's "Blue Boy" is an "icon," a self-sufficient sign that represents its object by resemblance. But we can also view it as an "index," pointing to something beyond itself that can be confirmed with collateral evidence, as when a physician sees in the pallor of Blue Boy's skin evidence that Gainsborough's model suffered from a nutritional deficiency. Or we might take it as a "symbol"—of youth, of British eighteenth-century portraiture, of the spirit of an age, or any other generality it may represent by convention or habit of association. And since the various modal classes need not exclude each other, a symbol may be further analyzed under the token-type distinction (a sign modality which is both symbol and token being in Peirce's lexicon a "replica").

Icon-index-symbol, tone-token-type, and the five dozen other Peircean classificatory terms are not grammatical or linguistic groupings but elements in a table of the modalities of signification. They are markers in a continuum of "semeiosis" (Peirce's punctilious transliteration of the Greek for what Wittgenstein called "operating with signs," or *Zeichenhandeln.*)

Peirce's categories proceed from a formal, three-way view of the semiotic relationship, in which a "sign" mediates between an "object" and an "interpretant," the interpreting effect that the sign produces upon, for example, a human mind. In exploring the myriad relations and gradations among these three correlates, Peirce's modalities make of every sign-event a moment pregnant with infinite possibility.

In so doing, they permit a more widely ranging phenomenology than that limited to the givens of actual experience. As constructs, they are judged not by the correspondence of each modality to some particular fact or utterance but by the explanatory power of the theory of signs as a whole. Like the elements of the periodic table, Peirce's sign-modalities occur in experience mainly in combination. And, like the periodic table, they are meant to cover every possible compound. One of their advantages over natural language is that they can account for sciences of discovery. Because they are not limited to what exists, they are able, at least in principle, to accommodate whatever might be. And by including modal terms to explain, criticize, and justify the persistence of commonsense ideas, the Peircean system both encourages flexibility and guards against a merely frivolous deconstruction of experience.

Peirce, one of the founders of modern symbolic logic, thus introduces into the philosophy of language the premeditated artificiality that constitutes at once the power and limitation of modern science. Science leaps out of common sense into a rigorously defined language that it uses to model aspects of experience. Peirce pursues this habit to a philosophically conscious and self-critical level.

As Hegel, relatively early in the develop-

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ment of modern historiography, produced a philosophy that took wing from historical consciousness, Peirce, at the first stirrings of the American research university, became the philosopher par excellence to bring the reality posited by modern science to the point of reunion with experience as a whole.

Whether we wish, as protagonists, to give the fullest play to a scientific worldview or, as critical philosophers, to understand its conditionality, Peirce's work as a whole—independent of its still unexhausted technical achievements—is an indispensable port of call. And because he was profoundly learned in ancient and medieval logic, Peirce gives us a philosophy in the grand tradition, one that is genuinely post- rather than anti-Aristotelian.

Whence the headnote of Joseph Brent's pioneering biography, taken from one of Peirce's portentously self-referential manuscript pages:

> [I intend] to make a philosophy like that of Aristotle, that is to say, to outline a theory so comprehensive that, for a long time to come, the entire work of human reason, in philosophy of every school and kind, in mathematics, in psychology, in physical science, in history, in sociology, and in whatever other department there may be, shall appear as the filling up of its details.

Brent's narrative leans heavily on such direct quotations from unpublished manuscripts and epistolary material, so that one can appreciate that Brent's work was seriously retarded by the refusal of the Harvard Philosophy Department circa 1958 to grant him access to four boxes of Peirce family letters. When he gained knowledge of some of the contents from other archival sources—and quoted from them in a 1960 doctoral dissertation in history at UCLA—he incurred, as he reports it, the wrath of Harvard. He believes that this hostility more than any professional judgment on the quality of his work accounted for the failure of academic presses to publish his dissertation in the 1960s.

Happily, Brent's preface reports that in 1989 Indiana University Press paid him a small advance to bring up to date and reconsider the doctoral work of thirty years before. Without incident, Harvard gave permission to quote from its full collection, and the shroud of secrecy surrounding Peirce's personal life, maintained by surviving relatives as well as a decorous Harvard department, was officially broken.

The family archive does in fact contain dirt on Peirce, but the real scandal is more institutional than personal. It lies in the conduct of scientific rivals, who seized upon Peirce's weaknesses to deny him preferment, employment, and grants. Brent documents what others have also observed: that after the death of Peirce's main patron, his father Benjamin Peirce, Jr., a group closed in upon him; the movement was orchestrated at crucial junctures by Simon Newcomb, the noted astronomer who succeeded Peirce's father as the most influential American scientist of his generation. Such eminences as the university presidents Eliot of Harvard, Gilman of Johns Hopkins, and Butler of Columbia were among Charles Peirce's leading detractors. Though they sometimes claimed to be protecting innocent students from Peirce's allegedly baneful moral influence, they also took care to deny him opportunities for guest lectures and pure research that involved no student contact.

Peirce's family and publishing connections, his admitted brilliance, and his own and his wife's inherited income, until they lost it in the crash of 1893, were such that he could not be eliminated entirely from the intellectual scene. His supporters included William James, Josiah Royce, John Dewey, a few loyal students he had inspired in his four years at Johns Hopkins, some college classmates, and several important editors, officials, publishers, and men of means: Garrison of the *Nation*, Carus of the *Monist*, Cattell of *Popular Science Monthly*, Baldwin of the *Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology*, Smith of the *Century Dictionary*, Langley of the Smithsonian, the publishers Putnam and Plimpton, the millionaires Pinchot and Morrison.

These admirers often came through in a pinch with a writing commission, a few lectures, a loan, or a direct subsidy. Charles's elder brother James Mills Peirce, a Harvard mathematics professor and dean of the graduate school, intervened to straighten out his financial affairs, and his younger brother Herbert, a career diplomat, used his Washington connections as well as those of Senator (and cousin) Henry Cabot Lodge on Charles's behalf.

But in the small university world of his day,

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Peirce's enemies controlled the heights. When Peirce was forty-five, Daniel C. Gilman abruptly dismissed him from Johns Hopkins upon receiving testimony that Peirce had lived with his second wife before the completion of the legal divorce from his first. After that Peirce was repeatedly blackballed from further university positions. When, in his mid-fifties, he began to reach, as philosophers often do, the full range of his powers, there was no institution to underwrite him, no body of students to take direct guidance from him.

Peirce's most enraging flaw was that he often seemed not to care. He was dedicated to making his mind a vessel through which reality might shine, and this gave him a childlike insouciance that was both a provocation and an easy target for academics bent on the more mundane aspects of their calling.

Charles had been raised in a hothouse environment in which intellectual excellence was prized above all else. His father, aunt, uncles, and family friends led lives largely devoted to science and mathematics. The elder Peirce was so completely concentrated upon intellectual achievement that, in the midst of the Civil War, he condoned slavery if used, as in ancient Greece, to free an elite for scientific inquiry. He began training his son early in mathematical games and in discrimination among the senses. When Charles was eleven he wrote "A History of Chemistry." At sixteen, father and son began regular readings in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*; at eighteen Charles worked with his father's sister on an English translation of the section on the Transcendental Analytic.

Both at Harvard and nationally, the Peirce circle was at the center of a movement dedicated to the proposition that intellectual excellence alone should determine appointments to scientific and scholarly positions. This meritocratic view, always of limited appeal, reflected a devotion to inquiry that became the guiding principle of Charles Peirce's life. It explains both the singleness of purpose and the resilience that enabled him to surmount many tribulations.

In charting Peirce's troubles, Brent does not flinch from the lugubrious or the sensational. He documents the facial neuralgia that caused Peirce excruciating physical pain for most of his life, the resulting addiction to narcotics, the violent outbursts, the periods of near madness, the (hetero-) sexual excesses, the financial crises, the petty mendacities and thefts. On slimmer evidence, Brent speculates on Peirce as a wife beater and on the earlier career of Peirce's second wife, Juliette, as a French courtesan. And, on Peirce's authority, he presents the philosopher's left-handedness as a disability comparable to neuralgia (Peirce attributed the incomprehensibility of his work to his "left-brained," diagrammatic way of thinking).

Brent is at his archival best, however, in tracing the bureaucratic proceedings that resulted in Peirce being severed from Johns Hopkins, ousted from the Coast and Geodetic Survey, and finally, denied an early Carnegie grant despite the support of the president of the United States, the secretary of war, a raft of the leading philosophers and editors, and Andrew Carnegie himself. At almost every turn Brent shows how Peirce's self-absorption and consequent obtuseness to his effect on others conspired to undercut his own cause.

As a consolation, Peirce, at age sixty-four, received the honor from the Harvard Corporation of allowing private funds raised by William James to be passed through it to pay him for a series of lectures—his one fleeting academic berth in all the years after the Johns Hopkins dismissal. The talks were given in Sever Hall, which stands on the site of the house where Peirce grew up (a bronze plaque noting this fact now graces the entry of the building).

Ever proving himself beholden to no one, Peirce opened the lectures with what must have appeared as chaffingly condescending remarks about the lively but mistaken pragmatism of William James, his most reliable friend and benefactor, who had generously credited Peirce with originating the philosophical doctrine. Peirce saw Jamesian pragmatism as exaggerating practicality into a metaphysical doctrine parading as an anti-metaphysics. (James, as Peirce saw it, took practical effect as a criterion of truth rather than as a razor for clarifying meaning, and Peirce would soon rename his own view "pragmaticism," the better to distinguish it from that of James.)

James reacted by firing off an uncharacteristically furious letter, not quoted by Brent, calling Peirce "a monster of desultory intellect . . . without even any intellectual residuum from his work that can be called a finished construction, only 'suggestions' and a begging old

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age." James subsequently discouraged publication of the Sever Hall lectures, but continued to stand by Peirce financially, raising a fund that assisted him in the mendicant, unusually productive final decade of his life.

In assessing Peirce as a philosopher, Brent has profited from the thirty years since his dissertation. Not only has the accumulating opinion on Peirce's philosophy helped to enrich the accepted view of it, but Brent modifies his earlier, callow thesis of a direct relation between Peirce's temperament and the allegedly failed architectonic of the Peircean system. Instead, he gives us, in his final chapter, a moving gloss on Peirce's own description of himself as a "wasp in a bottle," buzzing furiously in a glass cage formed by his own self-conception and the reaction of others to it.

Brent portrays Peirce as spurred by the ruins of his private life and scholarly career to a contrite, peculiarly scientific piety, in which the theoretical gift of hypothesis becomes man's best stab at entering into the mind of God. Brent argues also that the philosopher's belated attempt at a "moral reconstruction of pragmatism" should be read as a "direct result of Peirce's recognition of his own folly and the remorse consequent upon it."

A single-volume biography has understandable difficulty doing justice to Peirce's philosophical development. For this, one turns to the Peircean corpus itself and to the expanding literature of re-engagement with it. Notwithstanding Peirce's fame as a neglected genius, his work has always commanded the attention of serious thinkers. It can be argued that recognition of his importance has been retarded because major writers have been moved by his work to pursue, not a full and fair understanding of Peirce, but ambitious and sometimes original lines of their own.

Peirce's papers, certainly, have not wanted for distinguished editors. At his death in 1914, the manuscript materials not previously published were enough to fill seventy-five 500-page volumes of the sort now produced by Indiana University Press. Harvard paid his widow $250 for the lot. Josiah Royce took charge of the editing in the two years before his own death in 1916. In the early 1920s, the editorial task passed to Charles Irving Lewis, who had been brought to Harvard partly for this purpose after his *Survey of Symbolic Logic* (1918) proclaimed Peirce's contribution, on the basis of the published materials alone, to have been "the most considerable of any up to his time, with the doubtful exception of Boole."

Lewis spent two years immersed in the manuscripts and wrote an editorial plan before giving the project up to pursue his own work in modal logic. In the 1920s the fundraising efforts of a student of James and Royce, Morris Raphael Cohen of the City College of New York, enabled Harvard to employ as editors two junior faculty members, Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss, who were themselves to become important professors of philosophy.

Their first volume, published in 1931, cast Peirce's work into a mold for philosophy propounded by Alfred North Whitehead in his Gifford Lectures of 1926–27 (published as *Process and Reality* in 1929), in which a philosophical system was seen as generated recursively by a few fundamental metaphysical categories. Peirce seemed to fit this model precisely. From his triadic divisions of signs to his metaphysical categories of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness, triadicity recurred throughout his writings. To lay bare the architectonic of his philosophy, the editors began their collection with a volume devoted to Peirce's writings on the categories, without regard to chronology, to suggest that all else was generated from them. By 1935 Harvard University Press had issued the first six volumes of an eventual eight-volume *Collected Papers*, organized thematically.

The Hartshorne-Weiss edition revolutionized the accepted view of Peirce. Previous to it even Peirce's staunchest admirers considered his work fragmentary and undeveloped. The "tragedy" of Peirce was thought to be that his erratic temperament and unfavorable circumstances had conspired to deprive the world of any connected piece of his reasoning. Even Cohen, who had compiled the first Peirce bibliography (1916) and had edited a well-selected anthology of a dozen of Peirce's published essays (1923), had placed him among the lonely pioneers of philosophy whose main influence was in the fruitful suggestions they gave to others.

The Harvard *Collected Papers*, by contrast, established Peirce as the author of a major philosophical system. But it also set him up for a fall. It seemed to have him claiming too much.

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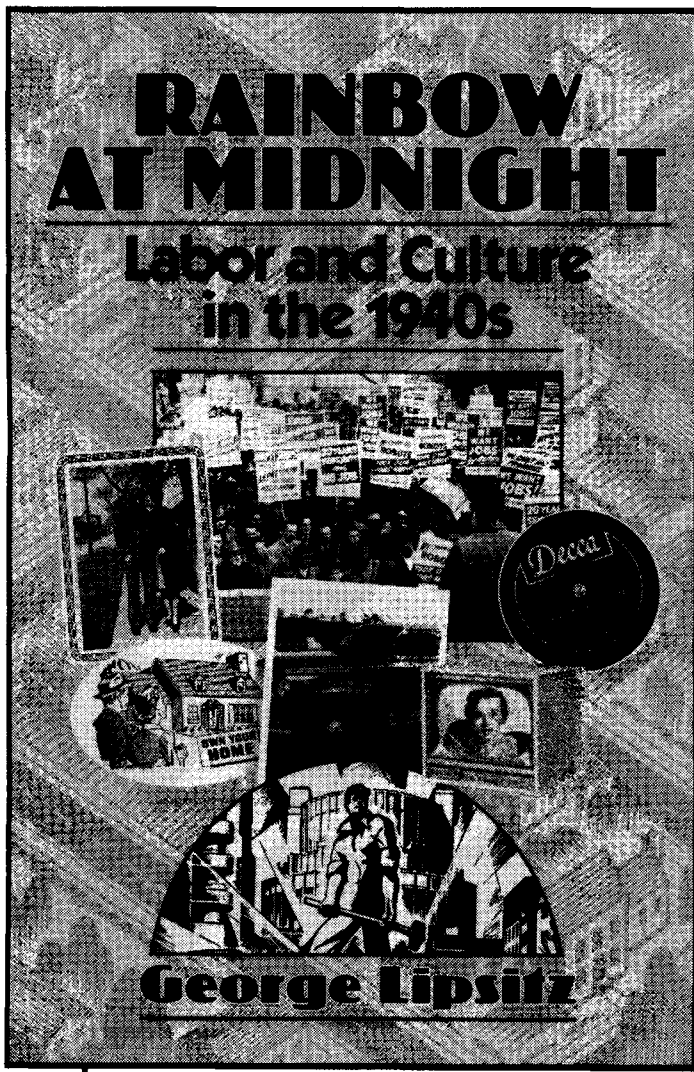

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A wave of contrarian scholarship arose showing the Peircean "system" to be quaint, or failed, or no single system at all but two incipient systems in conflict with each other, or a series of three or four of them each developing out of the collapse of the previous one. The author of the most thorough and influential of these critical works merely reflected academic common sense circa 1965 when he wrote, in the first issue of the quarterly *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society,* that "so much of Peirce's writing is so bizarre that the reader clings for dear life to those few doctrines which, like pragmatism, have an aura of reasonableness about them."

It was not until 1958, with the publication of the seventh and eighth volumes of the *Collected Papers,* edited by Arthur W. Burks and underwritten by the Rockefeller Foundation, that the scholarly apparatus to the Harvard edition included a partial chronology enabling readers to date the various excerpts. And it was not until 1967 that Richard S. Robin's annotated catalogue of the Harvard manuscript materials was published. (The editorial introduction to the recent electronic edition of the *Collected Papers* recommends using its search features in conjunction with the Burks and Robin bibliographies to undo the "artificial dismemberment of the Peircean corpus" in the topical arrangement of the original editors.)

In 1973 increasing dissatisfaction with the captious cast of the secondary literature led a group of scholars from the Charles S. Peirce Society to call for a more comprehensive, critical edition of his work, chronologically arranged. Under Edward C. Moore, the founding director of the Peirce Edition Project, funds were raised from the National Science Foundation, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and (in a remarkable gesture for an out-of-state writer by a local elected body) the Indiana State Legislature. Work on the chronological edition began in 1975 on the Indianapolis campus of Indiana and Purdue universities. It took a team of scholars six years to decipher, date, collate, transcribe, select, verify, emend, and annotate manuscripts before the first critically edited volume was ready for press. After eighteen years, the fifth volume, just out, takes Peirce's writings only through the aftermath of the Johns Hopkins period.

To hasten the dissemination of the post-Hopkins materials—a *selection* of which is now projected at twenty-five further volumes—photocopies of the full collection of dated manuscripts were early made available in open file cabinets both at the Peirce Edition Project and at the Center for the Study of Pragmaticism at Texas Tech University in Lubbock. Both the Indiana and Texas centers have other research aids that attract international visitors. The directors of both have actively promoted a range of research and study materials (most recently, *The Essential Peirce,* two volumes edited for convenient classroom and scholarly use by the current and past directors of the Peirce Edition Project, Nathan Houser and Christian Kloesel). As a result, the chronological edition has already given rise to a new wave of scholarship on Peirce's development.

The doyen of this scholarly movement is Max H. Fisch, whose first contribution to the Peirce literature came in 1939. Named by the Harvard Philosophy Department in 1959 as the official biographer, Fisch set about methodically to collect all relevant archival materials. Beginning with Brent's contribution of his extensive dissertation notes, scholars added to the "Fisch Notes"—a twenty-thousand-card collation of Peirce materials from numerous family and governmental archives—which were made more widely available at the Indianapolis and Lubbock centers. In addition, Fisch assembled forty-nine file drawers of scholarly correspondence and offprints on Peirce and an extensive personal library, which now forms the basis of more than seven hundred linear feet of bookshelves lining the walls of the Peirce Edition Project. As Fisch proceeded, he issued strategically placed articles that illuminated aspects of Peirce's thought and milieu. His services to other scholars, however, impeded his own progress on a biography. A punctilious correspondent, he was also known (as this writer can testify) to open his office, his files, and his home for weeks at a time to visiting researchers.

When Fisch's advancing years (he is now ninety-four) put a biography beyond his grasp, the directors of the Indiana and Texas centers, Christian Kloesel and Kenneth Laine Ketner, performed the filial act of collecting most of his important writings on Peirce under the title *Peirce, Semeiotic and Pragmatism.*

A careful scholar, Fisch nevertheless had a

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bold thesis on the origins of Peirce's pragmatism. Though Peirce was almost wholly preoccupied with science and logic, Fisch early suggested that the origins and implications of Peirce's philosophy were social. In this he followed an insight from Vico, who in Fisch's translation of him presents even logical relations as reflections upon institutionally dominant habits of thought. In an essay not reprinted in the collection, Fisch sees philosophy itself as emerging from the "critique of institutions."

For Peirce's pragmatism the institutional and social origins are, Fisch argued, bound up with law. Peirce and James both traced the doctrine to the early 1870s in the meetings of the Cambridge Metaphysical Club. Of the six most active club members, three were lawyers. Whereas James credited Peirce with pragmatism, Peirce himself cited Nicholas St. John Green, among the founding group of professors of the Harvard Law School, as the "grandfather of pragmatism."

Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., in his time the leading American writer on jurisprudence, was another of the active lawyers in the Cambridge Metaphysical Club, and Fisch saw in Holmes's youthful "prediction theory of law" the first application of pragmatism to the social sphere. Holmes's prediction theory defined law as what the legal system could be expected to enforce after whim and idiosyncrasy were winnowed out by successive review. This fit the pragmatic maxim as Peirce would later expound it, first in French and then in carefully convoluted English phrasing: "Consider what effects, which might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object."

Notwithstanding Holmes's antipathy to Peirce's speculative tendencies, Fisch suggested in the 1942 article that opens his collected essays that a Peircean recasting of Holmes might supply a more systematic logical ground than Holmes himself could muster.

Fifty years later, in the midst of a self-described pragmatic movement in American law schools, few have taken up Fisch's suggestion. Among the lawyers, an attempt to fashion a Wittgensteinian pragmatism (for which Richard Rorty rather than Wittgenstein would appear to be the philosophical mentor) may have delayed a grasp of Peirce's thought. The adage attributed to Wittgenstein that "meaning is use" is often misread as a pithy substitute for Peirce's original pragmatic maxim.

The original of Wittgenstein's remark, however, is neither pithy nor pragmatic. The words "meaning . . . is . . . use" are extracted from a much longer sentence that Wittgenstein characteristically limits to "a *large* class of cases—though not for all—in which we use the word 'meaning.' " The abridgment encourages a merely empirical inquiry into the practices of identifiable communities of interpreters. Peirce's pragmatic maxim, by contrast, is cast in a bolder spirit. It identifies meaning with *conceivable* practical bearings, independent of actual usage. It thus extends the community of interpreters hypothetically and indefinitely into all conceivable futures.

Peirce's maxim is intended to make a place for the imaginative element in science—hypothesis, the hallmark of what he called the method of abduction. Transposed into legal thought it would emphasize the vision that distinguishes disciplined jurisprudential reasoning from that of the pedestrian practitioner.

On a factual standard of use, Holmes's prediction theory of law could be maintained without much discernment. It would merely assert—as in fact Holmes did assert—the doctrine that law is what those in authority can reasonably be expected to do when on good behavior. It would seek the ultimate locus of law in current professional canons, a quest with understandable appeal in the law schools. By contrast, if pragmatic meaning extends to conceivability, the circle of interpretation will be more open. A prediction theory of law must then take into account a range of conjectured futures, many of which may not accord with the profession's conventional norms. The theory might then lead—as Holmes was indeed led—to a supplementary doctrine of judicial restraint founded in the fallibility of the legal profession.

A Peircean pragmatism thus shifts emphasis from the actual to the potential; by adding a greater burden of foresight, it anticipates Holmes's more mature jurisprudence. Which is what Fisch meant to suggest: that a Peircean standpoint helps to make explicit the underlying coherence in Holmes's thought in a way that eluded Holmes himself and that provides a logical basis for a reconstructed legal pragmatism.

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To repeat: Peirce's motive in providing explicitly for the free, forward play of mind was to give prominence to hypothesis in scientific discovery. Instead of stifling the bold, speculative leap, Peirce wished to find ways to encourage and discipline it. He did so out of a faith in the human capacity to guess correctly. As he saw it, the progress of science testified to a reality present in both the human mind and the order of the universe. Science did not proceed merely in small inductive increments but in imaginative theorizing in which our use of signs in their general aspects enabled us to participate in a natural order that was itself evolving toward greater generality.

If, then, as Fisch would have it, philosophy is rooted in the critique of institutions, the relevant institution for Peirce's philosophy as a whole is modern science. Indeed, Peirce may be profitably read in terms of a double burden he placed upon himself: creating a logic for science that would also embody, through philosophical critique, the self-restraint appropriate to the limits of science as an institution.

Recent thematic collections and secondary literature give prominence both to this dual theme and to Peirce's success in transcending it. There is, indeed, a growing scholarly consensus that Peirce advances the logic of scientific inquiry in the context of a broader philosophical criterion applicable elsewhere.

The extent of Peirce's immersion in the science of his day is evident in his reviews in the *Nation*, collected and indexed in four volumes by Kenneth Laine Ketner, and in his papers, grant applications, and publishers' prospectuses in the history and practice of science, collected by Carolyn Eisele, herself a pioneering scholar on Peirce's work in science and mathematics. Peirce often earned his daily bread with such writings, or at least tried to. They show him learned in the history of science, alert to new discoveries and trends, and remarkably prescient about fruitful lines of inquiry.

His more popular articles throw a few "sops to Cerberus," as he called the inevitable compromises in making theoretical issues accessible. Yet, since they were at times his only public medium, they often broach his most difficult ideas in deceptively fluent and abbreviated form. Viewed against the background of what Peirce was writing in his notebooks and suffering in his life, even a minor book notice may serve as a running commentary on central issues that engaged him. Especially poignant is his preoccupation with the honors and material support conducive to the flowering of scientific genius.

The thematic collections have encouraged an increasingly respectful treatment of Peirce's main work in logical semiotic and philosophy. Instead of trying to trip him up in inconsistencies and reversals, scholars are now wont to fasten on a powerful core of interrelated conceptions that provide a standard for both assessing his development and explaining his uncanny relevance across a variety of philosophical schools and academic disciplines.

Whether one approaches Peirce through scientific method, the pragmatic maxim, the theory of signs, his view of continuity, his work on the categories, his concepts of evolution and chance, his notions of God and love, or his logic of relations, one soon finds that each topic involves the others in a complex of ideas that he integrated with increasing mastery as he grew older.

Several new guides to this development are now available, each with some distinctive emphasis. Christopher Hookway's *Peirce* (1985), recently reissued in paperback in the Arguments of the Philosophers series, has the advantage over most of the earlier surveys of following Peirce on his own terms. Though alive with interstitial criticism, it does not try to impose an overarching structure or thesis upon him. Its leitmotif is Peirce's attention to traditional philosophical questions and his determination to supersede Kant. C. F. Delaney's *Science, Knowledge, and Mind* addresses Peirce's philosophy of science, using Descartes as his foil and limiting the number of concepts treated in the interest of brevity and readability. Carl R. Hausman's *Charles S. Peirce's Evolutionary Philosophy* stresses the architectonic character of Peirce's thought. By informing a reading of the early writings with the later, more speculative work, it develops a coherent view of Peirce's project, which it compares favorably with the best current academic work.

There is also an expanding monographic literature that reconstructs aspects of Peirce for contemporary use. In this technical realm, the strongest claims for Peirce are often the most narrowly couched. A prime example is Robert W. Burch's *A Peircean Reduction Thesis: The Foundations of Topological Logic*, which attempts in ten chapters an algebraic reconstruction of

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Peirce's logic. Burch sets his terms to prove a thesis central to Peirce's thought: that all logical relations of more than three elements are reducible to triadic relations, but that triadic relations are not reducible to dyads and monads. As Peirce liked to point out, our everyday language, by distinguishing between direct and indirect objects, has a version of this logical insight built into its grammar. "John gives Mary a book" cannot be reduced to the three dyads John gives/Mary, John gives/book, and Mary/book, whereas the four elements in "John gives Mary a book and a candle" are reducible into two three-element sentences without loss of logical content.

In the course of his demonstration, Burch argues (chapter 7) that all dyadic and monadic relations are expressible in a triadically grounded form, and (chapter 8) that the entire body of quantificational logic, which rests on a dyadic notion of identity, can be translated into a neo-Peircean system. In other words, triadic logics are richer than dyadic ones (though precisely how much richer is by no means settled, and several papers in *Studies in the Logic of Charles Peirce* begin to address the technical issues).

In an eleventh, non-algebraic chapter, Burch presents some of the fruits of his construction in graphs. He takes his cue from Peirce's own graphical systems of notation, as explicated by Don D. Roberts, J. Jay Zeman, and others. He compares Peirce's achievement in combining topology and logic—in effect, freeing logic from an algebraic notation based on movable type—with Descartes's melding of algebra and geometry in the analytic geometry. Burch's reconstruction is so much more perspicuously expressed in a few diagrams as to persuade one that topology is indeed the natural medium for Peirce's logic of relations, and that the heuristic test will come not with further algebraic work but with computer-graphic and other imaging aids.

The implications of Burch's argument are far-reaching. Peirce's core example of a purely triadic relation comes from semiosis, which relates object, sign, and interpretant. Peirce's approach differs from that of Saussure, the other pioneer of modern semiotic, who proposed a two-pronged view connecting the signifier and the signified. Burch's argument could be extended to suggest that Peircean semiotic swallows up the rival school.

The same point prompts a reconsideration of work done in Peirce's own name. Many who accept Peirce's triadic view of the sign divide the analysis of it into three dyadically organized subfields: semantics (studying relations of sign and object), syntactics (studying relations of signs to each other), and pragmatics (studying relations of signs to their interpretants). Charles Morris, an American follower of Tarski and the Vienna Circle who established this terminology in the 1930s, traced his approach to Peirce's first (1867) paper on the topic. John Dewey and the political scientist Arthur Bentley objected vociferously that something essential in Peirce's project was lost in Morris's three-way partition. Burch's proof that a triad cannot be reduced to three dyads makes their criticism of Morris more exact. It suggests that Peirce should be viewed not merely as precursor and contributor to the mainstream of semiotics of the past half century, but also as having conceived a project of a more spacious kind.

Burch is more explicit in drawing this very conclusion for modern logic. Previous to his work, debate had centered on whether Peirce's reduction thesis might have exceptions. Quine and others influenced by Tarski directed attention to the purely algebraic issue of whether there might be tetrads that are irreducible to triads. Burch concentrates instead on theses of more pointedly logical consequence: he argues that all relations of both more than and fewer than three elements may be rendered in triadic form without loss of *logical* content. He thus suggests that a three-way notion of identity ("teridentity") is what distinguishes logic from other branches of study expressible in mathematical form. If this is true, the achievements of twentieth-century logic, insofar as they are philosophically neutral, can be retained and superseded in a fully reconstructed Peircean scheme.

The issue is more than quantitative. The *tertium quid* that Peirce persistently provides for is the active role of interpreting mind. One may, as noted, use Peirce's semiotic to analyze signs without attending to their interpretants—as in a purely formal semantics treating the relations of signs to their objects. But we know in advance that, however compelling and precise such abstraction might seem, its clarity will be of an inferior grade. For, if meaning consists in conceivable practical bear-

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ings, an "uninterpreted" system is meaningless by definition, and a logic that prescinds the interpretant from its purview will be tempted to slip in hidden assumptions and covert interpretive judgments.

Among formal logicians (Peirce included), one accepted solution to this and other dilemmas is to stratify discourse, positing hierarchies of languages in which one interprets another. Peirce's elegant alternative is to provide for interpretation architectonically by casting logic as semiotic: He introduces interpretation from the bottom up, at the level of the sign-interpretant rather than only at the more inflated stratum of a metalanguage. Instead of pretending that formal logic and other branches of "pure" mathematics necessarily exclude interpretants, we are encouraged to analyze the modalities of interpretation peculiar to them. If the Peircean approach is accepted, a great deal of highly regarded twentieth-century work, including stock-in-trade notions that shape Burch's own presentation, would appear more narrowly applicable than previously thought.

A further technical topic with profound philosophical implications is to be found in Peirce's theory of the continuum. Peirce's father taught him the calculus as Leibniz had originally conceived it, as a continuum of infinitesimals. The Leibnizian view has been revived in late twentieth-century mathematics under the label "nonstandard." Nonstandard analysis, as well as his own work in modal logic and Cantor's work on orders of infinity, provides Hilary Putnam with a point of reference against which to reconstruct Peirce's view of continuity.

In the introduction to *Reasoning and the Logic of Things: The Cambridge Conferences Lectures of 1898* (jointly written with Kenneth Laine Ketner), Putnam shows that if we illustrate Peirce's continuum linearly, it can be grasped not simply as an uncountable infinity of points along a line, but as a potential explosion of infinitesimals at any point at which we may choose to cut the line. Or as Peirce puts it, a point "might burst into any discrete multitude of points whatever, and they would all have been one point before the explosion." As Putnam is acutely aware, this is not an isolated mathematical curiosity, but a technical way of presenting the metaphysical concept that led Peirce to call his later philosophy "synechism," the doctrine of continuity. Synechistic points are conceived *possibilia* of infinite (and infinitesimal) breadth and depth.

When we add to Putnam's analysis the reminder that semiosis provides Peirce with the prime case of continuity, the radical implications of his view are apparent. Peirce's sign relation, as we have seen, connects object, sign, and interpretant in an irreducible triad. But since every interpretant may also be viewed as a sign, to be registered upon the mind with its own interpretant, the continuity of signs will be unbroken. Moreover, since signs are open to modal analysis, not only does every sign-interpretant lead to others, but every sign is analyzable into a multitude of modalities.

Peirce's concept of continuity, in sum, when coupled with his view of semiosis, portrays the universe as both endlessly unfolding and susceptible to an inexhaustible plurality of representations, ready to "explode," as it were, at any point we care to examine. Within this picture, the organizing conceptions of much contemporary academic philosophy may be accommodated and delimited. For example, Peirce's microcosmic view of *possibilia* helps to situate larger talk about "possible worlds" in a context at once precise and metaphysical so that, as Putnam gently puts it, the possible-worlds theories of contemporary writers appear as a *façon de parler.*

A mind as powerfully kaleidoscopic as Peirce's is apt to neglect the contours of common experience. Peirce portrayed himself self-deprecatingly as physiologically prone to this failing. He at times attributed his genius for compact conceptions to his left-handedness, which disposed him to think diagrammatically, at times to the unusually small size of his brain, which limited the number of ideas he could entertain. Be that as it may, he was not bashful about suggesting how others might make up for his deficiencies within a structure that he set forth. In doing so, he sometimes slipped into what he called "triadomany," which is misconceived when it attempts to derive substantive classifications from three-way modal distinctions.

Peirce's program for inquiry as well as his underlying diagrammatic and triadic habits of thought are meticulously elucidated in Beverly Kent's *Charles S. Peirce: Logic and the Classification of the Sciences.* Treating what might be re-

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garded as a dated, nineteenth-century curiosity—Peirce's neo-Comtean classifications of the sciences—Kent excavates a latticed structure reminiscent of Escher. (In a much sketchier appendix she also compares Peirce's iconic habits of thought to those of Einstein.) In her hands the fusty tables of the sciences are turned into the best exposition available of Peirce's view of the place of logic in relation to mathematics, the positive sciences, and the several branches of philosophy. Kent traces the shifts in classification and terminology that reflect Peirce's approach to a fundamental dilemma: on the one hand, Peirce portrays *formal* logic as a branch of pure mathematics; on the other, he insists on the triadic and normative character of logical semiotic as against the diadic and non-normative character of mathematics. It follows that formal logic as a branch of mathematics will always fall short of representing the essential character of logic itself. This helps us to understand why for Peirce a logic of relations, even when expressed algebraically, must be classified as distinct from the algebra of relations. Far from being the passive follower of mathematical fashion, logic provides its own, inner dynamic for mathematical innovation. As Kent is aware, Peirce's deep admiration for Hegel's *Science of Logic*—remarkable in a pioneer of precise notation—follows from this underlying view of logic as always bursting the formal bounds in which it is cast.

Classification, moreover, raises questions central to Peirce's philosophy and, indeed, to any theoretical project that explains the world in terms of supersensible structures. Supposing Peirce's views of continuity and triadicity to hold, how would they affect the conduct of inquiry? Or, more broadly: Given a world of seamless continuity and unending possibility, how do we go about making the meaningful distinctions that are the stuff of science as it is practiced and of life as we live it?

Recent monographs attempt to show the way Peirce might address these questions on two crucial topics: inquiry and the self. In *Truth and the End of Inquiry*, C. J. Misak draws distinctions that sometimes elude latter-day pragmatists, as well as Peirce's analytic critics. To say, as Peirce does, that everything is relational need not mean that "all truth is relative" or merely situational. And to say that interpretation is integral to the sign relationship does not eliminate meaningful distinctions between knowledge and opinion.

Though Peirce's early pragmatic writings did not dwell upon what contemporary analytic philosophers call a theory of truth—he discussed most issues that concern them under the heading of "reality"—Misak performs an artful reconstruction to present the Peirce of the early, academic years as a figure who more than holds his own in contemporary debate.

Peirce, it should be said, had a way of putting the question that does not translate easily into current academic parlance. He saw "reality" as categorically distinct from "existence." (It is significant that in a famous essay he makes an argument for the reality, not the existence, of God.) What exists—brute materiality—forces itself upon us at the beginning of inquiry. Reality, on the other hand, is what we would believe at the completion of inquiry. (The notion of conceivability in the pragmatic maxim, we have seen, encourages us not only to consider what exists but also to form clear hypotheses about a reality that might be.) Adapting a notion from differential calculus, Peirce once called reality a "limit"—what would be believed by a community of inquirers after inquiry had run its course. By identifying truth with this hypothetical *consensus ad quem*, Misak constructs a "pragmatic theory of truth" that captures Peirce's streak of objectivity without sacrificing his vivid sense of the interpretative and communal element in science. Her account, which contains several important subtleties, errs, however, in speaking as if objectivity requires—and hence that a reconstruction of Peirce's system should somehow vindicate—a "bivalent" logic, in which propositions must be either true or false.

To the contrary, if we are to borrow terms about truth values from formal logic, Peirce's logic of inquiry would have as its mathematical complement a formal system of more than two values, in which, for example, a third value between true and false might accommodate the crucial no-man's-land of propositions that are unproven, unprovable, or open to reconsideration. (And it is no accident that Peirce developed the first matrix notation for many-valued logic in late, unpublished notebook entries, more than a decade before the logicians Łukasiewicz and Post independently published similar innovations.) As Peirce put it techni-

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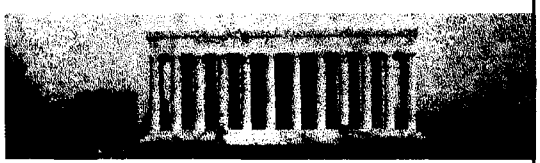

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cally, in keeping with one aspect of his doctrine of continuity, a triadic logic has a third value to represent "the common limit of 'P' and 'not P!' "

Peirce's overall trademark, both technically and metaphysically, is to set his terms so that intellectual boundaries are open to continuing revision in the pursuit of an ever more general grasp of reality—where "reality" is both explicandum and criterion for the inquiring mind and, at the same time, a general condition in which mind participates.

This supple and initially difficult conception is illustrated at the level of the formation of personality in *Peirce's Approach to the Self,* a book of essays by Vincent Michael Colapietro. Peirce makes the topic of the self inescapable. By building the interpretant into the definition of a sign, he requires as a philosophical complement a highly developed account of self-consciousness, self-criticism, and self-control. How else are we to sift out what is merely idiosyncratic in interpretation?

As he grew older, Peirce incessantly invoked an ideal of "self-control." Yet since his scattered writings on the self are often inconsistent and overstated, his emphasis on self-control has been plausibly read as a cry of remorse at the ruins of his private life. His failings on the topic have seemed especially glaring when compared with the robust and seductive portrayal of the self that suffuses the work of William James.

Hence Colapietro's work fills a gap of more than archival interest. If it can be shown that Peirce had a theory of the self that explains how we retain a personal identity while entering into a general and publicly articulable order of nature and society—and further how we exercise some control over the world and ourselves through the use of signs—this would justify strong claims for his philosophy as a whole.

Colapietro takes Peirce a good distance toward such a theory. He understands Peirce's semiotic to address a central problem in the conception of human subjectivity: the opposition between an inner, private self and a communal self defined by its relations with others—a tension, as Colapietro puts it, between solitude and solidarity. If mind is defined as operating with signs, and if the meaning of a sign is to be found in its conceivable practical effects, it follows that a self can be meaningful to itself only to the extent that it thinks in terms of practices, which are, in turn, predicated upon relations with others.

Peirce does not deny that we have idiosyncratic feelings, thoughts, and actions; that they are entrenched in the habits that define our individuality; and that we must summon energy to redirect or correct them. But all such personal struggles with habit are part of a continuum of semiosis and, as such, of a web of sign relationships whose meaning resides in practical bearings that go beyond us. The stage on which human life is enacted—including the life of the hermit-philosopher—is indelibly public.

Thus, whereas James's *Principles of Psychology* asserted the completely personal character of consciousness, Peirce stressed its communicability. In an evocative portrayal of consciousness, James had written:

> The only states of consciousness that we naturally deal with are found in personal consciousness, minds, selves, concrete particular I's and you's. Each of these minds keeps its own thoughts to itself; there is no giving or bartering between them. . . . Absolute insulation, irreducible pluralism, is the law . . . every thought being owned. . . . The breaches among such thoughts are the most absolute breaches in nature.

To which Peirce responded: "Is not the direct contrary nearer the observed facts?" That is, is not consciousness better defined by what it shares than what it negates in its relation with others? Is not thought itself, even the most private, really a dialogue involving signs that have meaning only by virtue of their effects in a world of outward relations? And if this is so, is not our capacity to enter into more general relations through our use of signs the very definition of human personality? On Peirce's view, a being speaking a purely private language would have a self utterly devoid of humanity.

In his early writings, when he adopted somewhat polemical stances to make his philosophy accessible to a broader readership, Peirce was wont to cast his communal insights in opposition to the logical individualism underlying English nominalism; at later times he railed against the crass individualism of the Gilded Age. In such moods he sometimes denied the self altogether. Colapietro's service is to glean the best from Peirce's writings on the self, supplemented by his mature concepts of indi-

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viduality, continuity, organism, substance, and mind, and to suggest that a fully elaborated Peircean account would subsume a doctrine of individual personality in a larger perspective. Colapietro also joins Peirce himself, Walker Percy, and others in believing that a philosophical psychology along Peircean lines would avoid confusions in psychology and brain science deriving from overly rigid subject-object and mind-body dichotomies.

Colapietro's reconstruction, however, stops short of the technical virtuosity that makes Peirce compelling in other fields. Colapietro is aware that Peirce's system provides the raw material for a still more precise treatment: The modalities of the interpretant include terms to describe the formation and reshaping of habits. Unfortunately, Peirce waited until too late in life to undertake the demanding task of refashioning his terms to account for "self-control" at the level of the sign-interpretant. To supply this gap would complete his project.

For it is integral to Peirce's view that the more general our grasp of reality becomes, the more precise and ramified will be our explanations. Far from submerging all distinctions in the Oneness of the All, his concept of continuity would have us proceed from a core of received, often fruitfully vague ideas to an ever more differentiated picture. Each new discovery leads to others. Each new concept is open to further elaboration. It is through the purposeful embrace of the public and communal character of semiosis that the self finds its ultimate meaning.

Does this vision, congenial to science, extend beyond the laboratory? Do the compact conceptions of Peirce's philosophy have the broader applicability he intended?

For the crucial core of Peirce's later philosophy—the theorizing that proceeds from the continuous sign relationship—the range of his relevance cannot be in doubt. Once we accept Wittgenstein's verdict that "all thinking is essentially operating with signs," it follows that theorizing about the power, presuppositions, and limits of semiosis has by definition a universal subject matter. It must apply to anything and everything that may occur to consciousness. Thus, had our discussion centered on the current scholarship that treats Peirce's significance for the arts, morals, religion, linguistics, anthropology, evolutionary biology, cognitive science, cinematography, information theory, or quantum physics, the same organizing concepts—semiosis, continuity, pragmatic meaning, modalities of signs, reality—would have come into play.

As a result, three tendencies in twentieth-century philosophy that have also claimed broad applicability require Peirce's perspective for their own completion. The linguistic turn that has dominated the English-speaking world is a subspecies of the semiotic approach that Peirce took. The phenomenological movement popular on the Continent is likewise insufficiently self-critical without a phenomenology of signs, the medium in which thought itself takes place (and Husserl's late metaphysical attempt in this direction in fact took a triadic, albeit ego-centered, form). The scientific trend in philosophy, insofar as it excludes the interpreting mind from its working definition of reality, is subsumed and reoriented in Peirce, who locates its abstractions in a more capacious yet no less exacting context. (Abner Shimony, the noted practitioner and philosopher of quantum physics, concludes the section on complex systems of his two-volume *Search for a Naturalistic Worldview* with this self-effacing credo: "It is honorable to be an epigone of Peirce.")

Admittedly, it seems extravagant to suggest that a blackballed, debt-ridden, small-brained, left-handed, pain-wracked, opium-eating, skirt-chasing, nineteenth-century recluse, by the simple device of including the sign-interpretant in the formal definition of the sign and by a life-long struggle to draw out the implications of this idea, may still have more to teach us than the contemporary discussions we have learned to regard as momentous.

But consider: From his first paper on the subject in 1867, Peirce returned repeatedly to the continuous sign relationship. For the last three decades of his life, Peirce worked in increasing isolation, writing prodigiously, publishing only a portion—buzzing furiously, as he put it, like a wasp in a bottle. His interests and his situation reinforced each other. He attended more and more to phenomena of common experience that could be examined without the benefit of colleagues or scientific instruments. Though the growth of the modern university has done great things for topics that can be cast into specialized departments, there is no reason to suppose that anyone in

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the past century would have duplicated, let alone superseded, Peirce's concentration on a few ineluctable and inter-related concepts. The only excuse for not taking him seriously is a skeptical dogmatism that would have us deny (on a priori grounds?) that some ideas may be more fundamental than others.

Peirce's chosen idioms were doubly demanding: on the one hand, metaphysics, in which contributions are judged against a tradition of 2,400 years; on the other, symbolic logic, then in its infancy, of which he was a pioneer in its algebraic, quantificational, and topological forms. He insisted that each must reflect the other. How many writers of the past century have had Peirce's aptitude for both prongs of this bilingual enterprise, or have matched his unrelenting fecundity in concurrent innovation in them into his seventies?

Now, eighty years after his death, Peirce has himself become a topic for specialized inquiry. New tools for scholarship and for pedagogy are giving him a delayed afterlife. The *consensus ad quem* is that we shall have to take him more fully into account. The wasp is out of the bottle. His sting remains to be felt.

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Charles Sanders Peirce: Contributions to The Nation, *Part Four: Index*. Edited by Kenneth Laine Ketner. Texas Tech University Press, 1987. $44.

The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings, Volume 1, *1867–1893*. Edited by Nathan Houser and Christian J. W. Kloesel. Indiana University Press, 1992. $45; paper, $19.95. Volume 2, forthcoming, 1995.

Reasoning and the Logic of Things: The Cambridge Conference Lectures of 1898 of Charles Sanders Peirce. Edited by Kenneth Laine Ketner, with an introduction by Kenneth Laine Ketner and Hilary Putnam. Harvard University Press, 1992. $45; paper, $22.50.

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Charles S. Peirce: Logic and the Classification of the Sciences. By Beverly Kent. McGill-Queen's University Press, 1987. $44.95.

Truth and the End of Inquiry: A Peircean Account of Truth. By C. J. Misak. Oxford University Press, 1991. $55.

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SOS for RLS

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON: A BIOGRAPHY. *By Frank McLynn. Hutchinson. £20.*

Reviewed by J. C. FURNAS

Robert Louis Stevenson died December 3, 1894, in his beloved house in Samoa overlooking the South Pacific. Observance of the centenary of his death, already elaborately planned, will be widely legible and audible, for interest in "the sailor home from sea, / The hunter home from the hill" has been rising, particularly in France but substantially also in English- and Spanish-speaking cultures.

The British phase led off two years ago with a new biography, Ian Bell's *Dreams of Exile.* It added little to the body of Stevensoniana, but in spite of its inane title, an engaging tone and occasionally apt analyses got it nominated for British nonfiction book of the year. The American edition (Holt, 1993) has been well received.

✪ J. C. FURNAS's most recent book is his autobiography, *My Life in Writing: Memoirs of a Maverick.*

A propitious start. But literary matters are not exempt from Murphy's Law. Or was the usual malevolent old fairy in there waving that wand? Frank McLynn, a prolific British nonfictioneer, soon weighed in with *Robert Louis Stevenson: A Biography,* a thick, high-detail entry that got conspicuous and mostly favorable reviews. Immediately, however, its validity was challenged at formidable length by Ernest J. Mehew, the acknowledged prime authority on Stevenson and the editor of the Yale University Press's forthcoming eight-volume edition of his collected letters. The American publication of McLynn's work this December promises to set off parallel controversy hereabouts, maybe even hotter because it goes far out of its way to bad-mouth an American woman—Louis Stevenson's Hoosier-born-and-reared wife, Fanny.

For those not specially well versed in Stevenson, McLynn's book could have been an extravagantly expansive encyclopedia article that would provide a reliable fill-in on a conspicuous writer whose work the biographer warmly admires. He makes a good case for his "firm conviction" that Louis Stevenson is "Scotland's greatest writer of English prose"

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and quotes Gerard Manley Hopkins to help make his case: "Stevenson shows more genius in a page than [Sir Walter] Scott in a volume." Soundly he describes Louis (as Stevenson's friends called him) as "a shrewder judge of human nature [with] a better sense of irony and humor" than Scott. There is a welcome comment every twenty pages or so: "A writer is supposed to know his world as God knows His." Using a vivid Nerli portrait on the jacket is an improvement on the archaic photographs of R.L.S. usually thus employed. But far too many of these 514 close-set pages are marred by speculative snippets or several-page clots portraying McLynn as an eager volunteer shrink laying down psychoanalytic law, usually of a conventionally Freudian kind. Or else he goes gratuitously and prolixly shrill about Fanny.

McLynn's disregard for inconvenient fact is necessarily off-putting. The prime example happens to concern me personally. He makes fifteen references to my book *Voyage to Windward: The Life of Robert Louis Stevenson* (1951), once crediting me with being "a careful biographer," twice with making sense. The rest collectively indict me as ringleader of a "pro-Fanny faction" obsessively defending her against anything like disparagement. Misrepresentation so blatant must be deliberate. In the *Times Literary Supplement,* Mehew wrote: "Furnas was (and is) antipathetic to Fanny but tried to be fair and balanced." I did so try forty years ago and think—or at least hope—I succeeded. But candor compelled me to describe Fanny in such sycophantic terms as "untidy, aggressive, presumptuous. . . ." *Voyage to Windward* also nibbled to the extent implied by data then available at the festering of Fanny's spiky instabilities into temporary but prolonged episodes of what McLynn gleefully describes as "total insanity." Further, to refute the charge of fanatic pro-Fannyism, I call as a witness the late Austin Strong, her adoring grandson, whom I interviewed several times while preparing my biography. He told a cousin of Louis's that he was outraged by the dreadful things my book said about his grandmother.

My annoyance with McLynn for charging me with conspiratorial truckling is, however, secondary to my duty to warn unwary partakers in the centenary that his book teems with such irresponsibilities. In the *TLS* it took Mehew fifty-five column inches of close-set type merely to sample these breaches of biographical good faith. Fanny's daughter, Belle Osbourne Strong (later Mrs. Salisbury Field) is accused of asking Louis to marry her instead of her mother—a fantasy McLynn owes to Fanny's virulent daughter-in-law whom he takes seriously, though her knowledge of such matters came mostly from confidences that Louis vouchsafed her from Up There, which is to say, posthumously; she never met him in the flesh. Heedlessly, McLynn warms over long-discredited Edinburgh gossip about Louis's distressing his father by determining to marry a lower-class girl he had seduced. Or was she a prostitute he had grown fond of? Or was it his father who invoked one's duty to make an honest woman of anybody one slept with, only to have to back away when Louis protested he was already sleeping with a married woman (Fanny) in Paris? In McLynn's pages, this slipshod, Victorian-flavored soap opera is actually presented as something solid. Its flimsy core, of course, was Louis's candor about his youthful resorting to Edinburgh's whores, which can hardly have been as extensive as McLynn implies on his meager allowance—half a crown a week, with most of that going for drink.

Not all these apocrypha are prurient, however. McLynn inflates "the wreck foundering [in *The Wrecker*]" into the cosmic significance of "a metaphor for the meaning of the life of Everyman." Only, in the book, no ship founders. The dismasted *Currency Lass* is abandoned derelict; the gone-aground *Flying Scud* is burned. This leaves the overblown alleged metaphor also hard aground. McLynn's early promise to show how *Treasure Island* "can be read in a number of ways, each . . . shedding light on Stevenson's subconscious" is unmercifully honored in inadvertent travesty of today's cult of wild-swing interpretation. Louis's subtly textured, strongly peopled, nimbly paced, single-minded narrative is accused of no less than hinting "in a Shakespearean way at a chaos beneath the superficial order of the universe." Eventually, of course, psychoanalytic prurience is resumed. The "treasure" in the title betrays Louis's alleged "castration complex." And the reader is instructed that Long John Silver's one-leggedness is significantly phallic. Natch.

Some of McLynn's clinical oracles are mere parlor-game psychiatry in the 1920s style of

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Don Marquis's Hermione's "Little Group of Serious Thinkers." Thus Henry Adams, touristing in Samoa in Louis's time, noted that the British consul and a local British missionary both had pretty wives and were on bad terms with Louis. Gamely McLynn rises to that bait: "Louis was always susceptible to pretty women, and they were usually attracted to him. Is it too far-fetched" to suggest that the Britishers' hostility hints at "a hidden agenda"? That suspicion is even more fatuous than McLynn's seeing "mere *suppressed* sexuality" (italics mine) in Louis's joyous verses about watching a girl strip naked.

On page 64, however, the first use of "Oedipal" early warned of more august auspices as the unholy trinity of Id, Ego, and Superego herein saddle up to ride high. Obviously the rival Durie brothers in *The Master of Ballantrae* are two sides of R.L.S.; James . . . uninhibited by sexual fastidiousness; Henry the monogamous dutiful drudge—the kind of man Louis despised but feared he might be himself. . . . The duel is Henry's attempt to cut biology out of his life [castration?], leaving culture and superego. . . . James jettisons honour in favor of sensual gratification, thus symbolizing the way capitalism overcame parochialism and feudalism in Scotland." This toe dipped in economics is not, pleasing to report, followed up; McLynn's cosmos is cluttered enough without Marx and Keynes.

Oedipus and mangled data blend in McLynn's analysis of "The House of Eld," maybe the earliest of Louis's remarkable astringent *Fables*. At the behest of the local wizard, the people of a certain country wear on the right ankle a heavy iron fetter. Young Jack finds a friend secretly dancing, fetter laid aside. Unsettled by this and other hints that nonconformity is possible, Jack leaves home to look into it. The wizard goes to intercept him, magically embodying himself in first Jack's clergyman uncle, then his father, then his mother, all successively failing to persuade him to go home and behave. Jack is aware that, when crossed, the sorcerer gobbles like a turkey. Each time family persuasion fails, the gobbling betrays the sorcerer and Jack kills the apparition. Frustrated, he starts for home. On the way he notices that the fetters are now on the left ankle. That's the new fashion, he is told, the old way was a superstition. When he gets home, his father, mother, and uncle lie dead.

True to St. Oedipus, McLynn detects "murderous unconscious impulses . . . between Louis and his parents" during the serious family frictions of his salad days. Never mind that matricide and avunculicide are lacking in the Oedipus legend and that the uncle's leading role shows that Jack is rebelling not against his parents specifically but the whole cultural establishment. Thomas Stevenson, his wife Margaret, and their son Robert Louis were, as members of the human race, biologically and neurologically unique, too complex for Freud's lay groupies to fit them into his Procrustean templates. But McLynn could dutifully see something Oedipal in Mother Goose's polygyny-man going to St. Ives.

Yet McLynn has one distinction: His vituperation of Fanny Stevenson and her entourage reaches seldom attainable heights. John Carey, reviewing this book for the London Sunday *Times*, said that its account of her and them "gives the impression that they had done him some personal injury." Some favorable reviewers were also uneasy about McLynn's intemperance. My sharpest summary of Fanny called her "*parvenue*, opinionated presumer, overweening bluestocking. . . ." One can understand why her grandson was annoyed. But McLynn, going on overheated adrenals, calls her a "bourgeois spendthrift [given to] posturing, hyperbole, fantasy, self-pity, and paranoia." He never admits that on the odd Tuesdays and Thursdays she was loyal, plucky, intelligent, and briskly humorous. The best McLynn can say for her is that she was a good pistol shot and successful in raising poultry. But even then he had to sneer at this "pioneering gun-toter" and "psychic Hoosier."

Most students of Stevenson give Fanny a good word as at least a harried, devoted nurse for a lover-turned-husband who was very ill for so much of their life together. None of that for McLynn: his story is that whenever Louis went down again, she usually managed to get out of nursing him by herself coming down with some other ailment.

Venom develops a crass flavor when McLynn suggests that, misled by art students' gossip about Stevenson's being heir to a great fortune, Fanny deliberately inveigled him into bed and marriage. Double nonsense: Louis's parents were comfortably well off and often subsidized their struggling, often ailing writer son, but never on a scale that would give an

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impression of great wealth; nor was Louis the kind to invent and boast of great expectations. Nor would a scheming fortune hunter have divorced a philandering but attractive and solvent husband to marry a lover with at least a foot and a half in the grave who was sure he had permanently estranged his family. McLynn's Fanny is all warts.

Maybe invoking guilt by association, McLynn sees Fanny, her son Lloyd Osbourne, daughter Belle, and her son-in-law, Joseph Strong, "the greedy, grasping Osbourne family" as cuckoos in Louis's hard-earned Samoan nest, abusing his goodwill and household loyalty, so straining his life that it brought on the stroke that killed him just when his writing powers were reaching new heights. Their "powerful Osbourne snouts" took care to push outsiders "away from the Stevenson trough." True, Belle Strong was as flighty and testy as her mother, though less talented. And boozy, feckless Joe Strong, though a competent painter and sometimes charming, depended heavily on Louis. McLynn, of course, overplays all that while saving his red-hottest shots for young Lloyd Osbourne.

Louis regarded Lloyd Osbourne as virtually a son, fostering his hope of a writing career, collaborating with him on three books. Lloyd's later writings were often published but undistinguished, and most of his life he was inconspicuously comfortable on revenues from Louis's literary estate. It was Lloyd's first wife who, as divorced woman-scorned, brewed those corrosive tales about the Osbournes that McLynn finds so palatable. He should have scored Lloyd at least an assist. What he got instead was both barrels loaded to the muzzle, for here is McLynn's characterization: "lazy, self-regarding, snobbish, venal, amoral, and corrupt . . . treacherous ingrate."

Osbourne-phobia extended even to quadrupeds. One of Louis's and Fanny's wedding presents was a high-strung Skye terrier. "We adore that dog," Louis wrote and immortalized him in a lively essay, "The Character of Dogs." But being an adjunct to an Osbourne, this eighteen pounds of engaging turbulence gets a full half page of McLynn's abuse: "monster . . . only a besotted owner could have endured the bad behavior of this mutt . . . over-excitable, bad-tempered, obstinate, sly." The text rejoices when the poor dog dies overmatched in a street fight. And Fanny gets a backhand slap for failing properly to housetrain him.

Those seeking sounder views on Fanny are recommended to try Margaret McKay's *Violent Friend* (1968); the title is from Louis's description of her in a letter to James M. Barrie. Those fancying vivacious French, some authentic new data, and a wryly sympathetic treatment should relish Alexandra Lapierre's *Fanny Stevenson: entre passion et liberté* (1992, Laffont, Paris), somewhat fictionalized but responsibly researched by a scholar-novelist. (An English translation will be published here early next year by Carroll & Graf.)

Developing interest in Robert Louis Stevenson may well lead to more biographies. One hopes they will eschew including such New Age wisdom as McLynn's absurd "Louis always tried to incorporate the yin and yang of both conscious and unconscious in his work." As a veteran biographer, I should also advise mistrust of certain juicy pseudodata that, if McLynn encountered them, were too shaky even for his extreme tolerance: The scenery of *Treasure Island* is not drawn from either Tobago, or Baja California. It is not true that Louis consulted Freud in Paris and was prescribed cocaine. Or that in her early fifties Fanny had a miscarriage and buried the residue in the cellar. Or that Louis's venereal disease contracted during his youthful whorings (as he admitted) was syphilis; syphilitic rashes don't itch . . . certainly not in the way reading this tendentious, ill-tempered book does.

Grande Dame

MARGUERITE YOURCENAR: INVENTING A LIFE. *By Josyane Savigneau. Translated by Joan E. Howard. University of Chicago Press. $25.*

Reviewed by ANN M. BEGLEY

Freud believed that biographical truth is unattainable. So did Mark Twain, who maintained that even if we acquired an accurate history of the exterior man, the interior one would forever remain hidden. The subject of a

✪ ANN M. BEGLEY's studies of Simone Weil and Marguerite Yourcenar have been published in *European Writers: The Twentieth Century.*

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biography may deliberately frustrate researchers by concealing, falsifying, or manipulating the facts, sometimes constructing a persona that only resembles the real self. Then, too, the biographer's voice may be a biased one, and in the effort to penetrate the mystery of the other personality, to support a thesis, to appeal to a particular audience, or to make the literary portrait more spicy, more enticing, the sauce that is added is apt to be conjecture.

Certain that she would eventually be "the prey of biographers" in whom she had no confidence, Marguerite Yourcenar (née Marguerite de Crayencour), one of the most respected writers in the French language, contrived to restrict what would posthumously be written about her, just as she attempted to control interpretations of her work by steering critics in certain directions by means of comments that she added to her books as prefaces, epilogues, notes, or "reflections." Before her death in 1987, at the age of eighty-four, she systematically burned some of her personal papers, placing many others—in particular, her long and abundant correspondence with Grace Frick, her "conjugal" companion for more than forty years and translator of several of her volumes—under a seal, at Harvard University, until 2037. In her trilogy *Le Labyrinthe du monde*, which some have called an autobiography and others have more accurately labeled fictionalized memoirs, Yourcenar refuses to take center stage, emphasizing instead her family lineage and some of her acquaintances; she repeatedly referred to the third panel of this triptych—where she is less in the wings—as "my novel," thus deliberately undermining the veracity of the history she narrates. And in the "Chronologie," the autobiographical sketch that she prepared, in the third person and unsigned, for the Bibliothèque de la Pléiade edition of her complete works—rarely is a living author included in this important collection—she not only recorded errors but omitted salient facts.

Josyane Savigneau, literary editor of *Le Monde*, has responded to the challenge and written the first biography (there have been other brief and incomplete accounts) of the only woman to have been elected to the Académie Française (1980) since its founding by Cardinal Richelieu in the first half of the seventeenth century. Underscoring the subtitle of her book, *Inventing a Life*, Savigneau evokes the series of discrepancies that she encountered in her research; uncovers traces of France's first *Immortelle* that had, deliberately or accidentally, been obscured; and concludes that Yourcenar, an elusive figure on the literary landscape, carefully constructed an "intriguing persona that helped attract an ever more numerous public to her books."

The controversies surrounding Yourcenar's election to the French Academy, the highest literary recognition France has to offer, were considerable. Some academicians had to be persuaded that denial of membership on the basis of gender was an unenlightened attitude. In her acceptance speech, paying tribute to the shadows of the "invisible troop of women" surrounding and accompanying her, "who should, perhaps, have received the honor much earlier," Yourcenar recalled, not without a certain irony, this august body's traditional practice of placing women on pedestals while neglecting to offer them a chair, a reference to the forty chairs in the Academy.

Another source of contention was the fact that Yourcenar, best known for her novels *Memoirs of Hadrian* and *The Abyss*, had violated tradition by refusing both to present her own candidacy and to solicit the votes of current members to assure her election. Instead, Jean d'Ormesson, the writer and former editor of *Le Figaro*, proposed her name; she responded that, if elected, she would not be so ungracious as to reject the honor bestowed on her, but under no circumstances, she warned, would she feel obliged to spend several months a year in Paris in order to attend the meetings of the Academy. Her sexual ambiguity was also an issue. Editors and critics have repeatedly paid Yourcenar the barbed compliment that her writings are virile, pointing out that her most memorable protagonists are, almost exclusively, male.

For some, the most serious concern was the fact that Yourcenar was perceived to be *une étrangère*, a foreigner who, for more than four decades, had made her home on Mount Desert Island, off the coast of Maine. She became a naturalized American in 1947, "forgetting," Savigneau claims, "to stop by the French Consulate to retain her nationality of origin." This assumption manifests either a lack of knowledge of U.S. immigration law or an absence of belief in Yourcenar's integrity. For how could anyone, in good faith, swear allegiance to the

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Constitution of the United States, formally "renounce and abjure absolutely and entirely all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign . . . potentate, state or sovereignty," and at the same time apply for retention of her French citizenship? The irony of it is that Yourcenar's worldview did not include the concepts of patriotism, national pride, and the like; rather she espoused a kinship with all humanity, declaring frankly that she had several homelands and belonged perhaps to none.

While acknowledging this, Savigneau assigns Yourcenar a linguistic homeland, insisting that the only thing that mattered, in this regard, was "the language in which one chose . . . to perform the act of writing literature." Yourcenar "was building an oeuvre in the language she loved . . . while immersed in a language impoverished by people who had not learned it well and had turned it into little more than a tool, a language whose degraded form was on its way to invading the planet: English." Unquestionably, Yourcenar "ardently loved her native tongue, as only the French perhaps are wont to," to use the words of Joan E. Howard, whose fine translation this is. But the language that writers employ—unless pragmatic reasons dictate otherwise—has been imposed on them by accident of birth and early environment; it is not chosen, the likes of Samuel Beckett being linguistic curiosities. In any case, the problem of her forfeited nationality was resolved by the French consul in Boston who reinstated this novelist, short-story writer, poet, playwright, essayist, critic, translator (some of her translations are more accurately termed adaptations), and recipient of a wealth of honors as a French citizen.

Savigneau argues—and at length, even though evidence is lacking—that it was Frick who obliged Yourcenar to live in the United States among a "people without a civilization." In her translator's foreword, Joan Howard, a Yourcenar scholar, speaks of "a certain French disdain for things American" and suggests that "there exists within France, a nation so attached to its cultural and geographic patrimony, a perplexity of sorts regarding why on earth it was that this national treasure . . . should have chosen to live her life on unhallowed ground—which is to say, beyond the borders of France." "In any event," Howard continues, "and whatever the reasons, there can be no denying that she did so, nor that the most creative years of her life were spent here—inventing her heroes and inventing a life."

The portrait of Marguerite Yourcenar that emerges is that of a haughty, authoritarian, erudite, and uncommonly gifted artist; a passionate woman with megalomaniacal tendencies, intolerant of negative criticism; a hypochondriac who lived according to her own, sometimes quite contrary, terms. Of her relationship with Grace Frick, who died following a heroic twenty-one-year struggle with cancer, Yourcenar once observed, "First it was a passion, then it was a habit, then just one woman looking after another who was ill." After Frick's death, the proud grande dame, then in her seventies, is depicted as a pathetic figure caught up in an overwhelming passion for a young American of thirty, Jerry Wilson, who became her traveling companion, living with her part of the year. When he drank excessively, Wilson sometimes abused her, both verbally and physically. Nevertheless, a powerful and complex bond existed between the two. After Wilson died of AIDS, Yourcenar found herself, Savigneau informs us, "very much alone." Yet not entirely so.

For some writers, the boundary between fiction and reality becomes blurred. In some arcane way, their literary creations take on a life of their own, independent of their creator, outside the framework in which they were placed. Flaubert's famous declaration "Mme Bovary, c'est moi" was metaphorical, but the dying Balzac repeatedly called upon the fictional physician of his novels to care for him. Graham Greene once remarked that he was not responsible for the words of his characters. And Yourcenar, speaking of the "symbiotic relationship" she had with the fictive Hadrian, confided that at times she permitted the second-century Roman emperor to lie to her: "I think he lied quite a bit on the subject of his election, of his coming to power. He must have known a bit more about it than he told me." She further asserted, with all sincerity, that Zeno, the protagonist of *The Abyss* who went in search of "One Who perchance Is," was her constant companion and counselor, who would surely be present at her bedside when her time came to take that final and inevitable "passage." When her time did come, following her instructions, she was cremated and her ashes buried on Mount Desert Island.

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Her manuscripts and original editions are in the archives at Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine.

In addition to such motifs as sensuality, death and immortality, time and eternity, and the unity of all matter, the theme that informs much of Marguerite Yourcenar's work is the enigma and "terrifying force" of love, that "terrible disorder" which is a source of joy that invariably means suffering. Disillusionment, abnegation, and humility inevitably accompany "the burden of loving somebody." Hadrian reflects that "the weight of love, like that of an arm thrown tenderly across a chest, becomes little by little too heavy to bear." In *Fires*, a collection of prose poems, the authorial voice speculates that perhaps love does not merit the exalted place assigned it by poets. Nor does transitory human love satisfy the universal inner longing; the re-created Mary Magdalene, in a long monologue, declares that only God's love is perfect, gratuitous, and eternal. Yet ephemeral human love is, for Yourcenar, in some mysterious way affiliated with the Infinite, permeated by a kind of mystical energy. In various cultures of both the East and the West, sexuality is viewed as a symbol or harbinger of union with the Eternal, or at least of spiritual ascent. Echoing Paul Claudel's *The City*, Graham Greene's *The End of the Affair*, and much of the work of François Mauriac, Yourcenar depicts the sacredness of human love as an obscure and unknowing search for the Divinity, its primary function being to raise man out of himself, to destroy his egocentricity, and ultimately to lead him to the experience of infinite beatitude.

Savigneau's volume is not a literary assessment. She concentrates on the woman, not on the art—an art that is remarkable in both its wide range of literary genres and its profound psychological and metaphysical meditations. Nor is this a definitive account of the life of Marguerite Yourcenar. For that we must wait, as her biographer readily admits, until access to all existing documents will permit a more accurate evaluation of hypotheses. Even then, Savigneau judiciously notes, it will be difficult to distinguish what Yourcenar truly "lived" from what she "reconstructed." And "the 'shadows of time' are not yet long enough upon Marguerite Yourcenar for any likeness to bring out . . . all the nuances and contrasts of her life."

Yourcenar, who always maintained the highest degree of discretion regarding her personal affairs, would not approve of Savigneau's intimate reconstruction of her life. She would, however, appreciate the meticulous research that went into it. Despite the rash conclusions—some of which smack of gross sentimentality—this is a work of value that is bound to alter one's perception of "Madame" (as she insisted on being addressed), revealing, as it does, aspects of the life of this great contemporary writer that were previously unknown, shattering the mythification to which France's national icon was so often subject. It is, at least for the present, the source to which all Yourcenar scholars must henceforth refer. In France, *Marguerite Yourcenar: L'Invention d'une vie* (1990) was awarded the Prix Fémina. In the United States, owing to remarks that land like well-aimed blows, reader response may not be as enthusiastic. Still, Americans have little *amour propre*, and this volume was published on the savage shores of a country where Marguerite Yourcenar chose to spend the greater part of her adult and creative life as an American citizen.

All in the Family

THE WARBURGS: THE TWENTIETH-CENTURY ODYSSEY OF A REMARKABLE JEWISH FAMILY. *By Ron Chernow. Random House. $30.*

Reviewed by PAUL DELANY

The Warburgs appear in the sixteenth century as "Court Jews" in the town between Frankfurt and Hamburg from which they got their name. They were not allowed, by German law at the time, to have surnames of their own. Because Jews were also forbidden to own land or to carry on everyday trades, they became the handlers of money—lenders at interest and dealers in foreign exchange. Georg Simmel said that the Jews provided "the best example of the correlation between . . . money interests and social deprivation." Money, in Simmel's view, was the one thing that could

✪ PAUL DELANY is professor of English at Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, and author of *The Neo-pagans*.

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make up for the stigma inflicted on the Jews; and money was the one trade that Christian society would let them pursue, thanks to the Church's mistrust of interest and the aristocracy's mistrust of anything not a tangible product of the soil. The Jews were thus concentrated in a role that made them alien, resented, and indispensable—and in the most dynamic and mysterious sector of the modern economy, finance. This was a dangerous niche to occupy, though not more dangerous in the German principalities than anywhere else.

When Warburgs moved into Hamburg in the seventeenth century and set up as international bankers, they became doubly marginal. The problem for traders was always whether you could trust their foreign counterpart; only Jews, not having a real country of their own, could reliably do business with their co-religionists across national boundaries. Their exclusion from the mainstream made them ideal go-betweens, with a global view of the opportunities arising as Germany unified itself and Hamburg became its principal port.

M.W. Warburg & Co. thrived as a private bank, deeply involved both in trade and in the German industrial revolution. It was a family concern in every sense. When more capital was needed, young Warburg men were married into other wealthy Jewish families, who gave dowries with their daughters. These marriages also created commercial ties between Hamburg and Russia, Hungary, and France. The bank still had two long-term problems: new capital could not be raised in a predictable way, and sons were not always as good at business as their fathers. Thomas Mann was the archetypal son of a mercantile family who preferred culture to commerce; his Warburg counterpart (and contemporary) was Aby M. Warburg, who became a great art historian and bibliophile—lavishly subsidized by his brothers, who stuck to their tasks in the bank. Money and art did not have to be enemies, of course. The Warburgs, along with Jim Loeb (who married a Warburg), endowed such distinguished cultural institutions as the Loeb Classical Library, the Warburg Library (moved to London in 1933), the Juilliard School, and the Art History Department of New York University.

By 1914, M.M. Warburg was the leading German commercial bank, and the family was also well established on Wall Street. Felix M. Warburg and his brother Paul both married into the firm of Kuhn, Loeb and settled in New York. Paul, a brilliant monetary theorist, masterminded the belated foundation of an American central bank, the Federal Reserve, in 1913. The American Warburgs did not establish a major financial business in their own name, but they were successful enough to become leading philanthropists, patrons of the arts, and political advisers. They blended securely into the American establishment, unlike their German cousins. But it is the more extreme and tragic German family history that gives Ron Chernow the structure, and the moral, for his book.

The German Reich of 1871 enfranchised the Jews. Some disabilities remained—they could not be officers in the army, for example—but for the first time they could consider themselves citizens of Germany. Chernow views their emancipation as a tainted gift: "Discrimination had acted as a preservative to their identity, while freedom threatened to corrode their unity and dilute their culture. Henceforth, they would try to be both Jewish and German at once—with initially happy but ultimately tragic results." The Warburgs in-

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deed threw their hearts into becoming "truly German," from heel-clicking military service to Max Warburg's enthusiastic support of German economic imperialism before 1914. A hundred thousand German Jews served in the war, out of 550,000 in all. By 1932 the rate of intermarriage by German Jews had reached 60 percent, and their cultural achievements made them the most creative minority of modern times.

When things went so terribly wrong in 1933, the Warburgs took the stand that they were as German as anyone else and would fight to remain in their homeland. As late as 1937 Max Warburg proposed, as the toast to a bar mitzvahing boy, "Always remember you are a German." Meanwhile, the bank was being "Aryanized" by slices, and much of its day-to-day business came to be helping German Jews liquidate and move abroad. Max himself did not sail for New York until August 1938.

Throughout the twenties and thirties the Warburgs had carried on a running battle, within their own community, with the Zionists. In 1930, Chernow notes, "several hundred Jewish leaders signed an ad asserting their German loyalty and rejecting a Jewish homeland." The Warburgs supported Jewish settlements in Palestine, but told Chaim Weizmann that most Jews still wanted to be accepted as full citizens in the West. They refused to confine their aid for Jews in distress to those wanting to move to Palestine, and they infuriated the Zionists by financing agricultural settlements for Jews in Russia and the Ukraine during the 1920s. Above all, Felix M. and other Warburgs opposed a Jewish state in Palestine. They hoped for peaceful coexistence between Arabs and Jews, and they believed that Zionist policies made it inevitable that the two peoples would eventually go to war.

Chernow—with benefit of hindsight—considers the stance of the Warburgs and the elite of German Jews to be profoundly misguided. "The Warburgs struggled," he writes, "with an insoluble identity crisis, trying to solve the riddle of who they were. . . . The Nazis would exploit the identity conflict among German Jews, which weakened their capacity to withstand assault." This critique of the assimilated German Jews recurs regularly throughout Chernow's book and provides its closing words: "Was the germ of anti-Semitism finally dead in Germany? Or was it only dormant and waiting to flare up again? Had the Warburgs come back [to Hamburg] in vain?"

The underlying narrative of *The Warburgs* is of a twentieth-century Exodus. The German Jews enjoyed their fleshpots, not believing that a hostile Pharaoh would rise up to oppress them. God sent them into the wilderness to reclaim their true identity; but even there they worshipped the golden calf. They lay with "the daughters of Moab . . . and bowed down to their gods" (Num. 25:1–2). God requites them with slaughter and plague, until they return to the straight way.

This is the cautionary tale that haunts Chernow's "family saga," a narrative that applies both to individual Warburgs who dilute their Judaism and take gentile wives and to the German Jews collectively. To have a "real" identity you must remain an observant Jew, marry within the faith, and be a Zionist. But in postwar America the Warburgs continued their German ways, moving away from Judaism "as the doubts of one generation hardened into denial in the next." Chernow argues that their successful acculturation came "at the expense of their religious identity"; they took up "the pursuit of pleasure that comes to dominate many rich families," and they discarded Judaism because it was "a barrier to social advancement, an unwanted burden from a darker past."

In 1959 Jimmy Warburg went to Temple Mishkan Israel, in Hamden, Connecticut, and denounced Israel for creating "a new chauvinistic nationalism"; he called it "a state based in part on medieval theocratic bigotry and in part upon the Nazi-exploited myth of the existence of a Jewish race." Sir Siegmund Warburg, in turn, became a bitter critic of the Likud regime that came to power in 1977—an example, for Chernow, of his "headstrong, unpredictable nature" and his tendency "to dismiss Zionism as another brand of nationalism." But the Warburgs, and others like them, had long held a consistent position. They wanted Jews to be "normalized" as a minority within Western democracies rather than as a majority in a newly created Jewish state; and they believed that Jews had to choose one path or the other to emancipation. As the financier Jacob Schiff put it, "I cannot for a moment concede that one can be at the same time a

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true American and an honest adherent of the Zionist movement."

Chernow's tale of apostasy and retribution is only one version of the Warburg saga. No Warburgs renounced their Jewish identity in the 1930s, though they believed and hoped—perhaps for too long—that they could remain Jewish citizens of Germany. Hitler's decision to implement the Holocaust in 1941 had nothing to do with the choice of individual Jews to have more or less of "Jewish identity." The concept itself, as Chernow uses it, rests on ideas of purity and defilement that conflict with the modern reality of constant assimilation, emigration, transculturalism, and hybridization. It is well known that the more assimilated European Jews were, the more chance they had of escaping the Holocaust: it was easier for them to emigrate, and they had more potential helpers in gentile society. More than two-thirds of the German Jews survived, including almost all the Warburgs; Jews who lived through the war in Germany were mainly married to Christians or had a gentile parent. If God was punishing the Jews for backsliding, why did he allow the assimilated to escape and the Orthodox to die?

Jews like Max Warburg supported German imperialism because they considered themselves patriotic Germans, just as English or American Jews might identify with the national interests of the countries they lived in. Nonetheless, what remains most impressive about the Warburgs is not their nationalism but their internationalism (though when Max Warburg writes in favor of world federalism Chernow calls him "a dreamy old man taking refuge in simplistic visions"). Economic internationalism also fueled the great Warburg success story after the war, the rise of S.G. Warburg & Co. in London. Sir Siegmund Warburg's invention of the Eurobond market in the early 1960s was a natural offshoot of the family tradition. During the German inflation of the twenties, young Siegmund had seen the family bank circulate foreign currencies in Germany as a substitute for the crumbling mark. Eurobonds assembled short-term dollar deposits in Europe for long-term investment lending across national boundaries; the first issue was regulated by British law, signed in Holland, traded in Luxembourg, denominated in dollars, and for an Italian borrower. As Jacques Attali puts it in his book on Siegmund Warburg, *A Man of Influence: Sir Siegmund Warburg, 1902–82* (Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1986), Eurobonds made S.G. Warburg into "the symbol of the new form of post-war world capitalism: totally delocalized."

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Chernow dismisses Attali's book as untrustworthy; his own volume is authorized and rests on a solid base of family documents and interviews. But Chernow is always trying to cut Siegmund down to size, in contrast to Attali's hero worship (it is easy to see who Attali took as a model for his own ambitions as a financial titan). This difference of attitude to Siegmund reflects the concerns of the two biographies. Chernow concentrates on *family* relations; he gives the powerful Warburg women their fair share of the limelight, if he also includes too many pages of domestic trivia. He supplies a lively and dramatic account of family ups and downs, but says curiously little about events at the office—how the family banks were run, how much money they made, and how they made it, what special role they played in modern financial systems. Chernow gives no figures on how rich individual Warburgs were or where their wealth is placed today.

Attali handles public issues with much more

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detail and insight than Chernow, while drawing a veil over private life; he tells you only that Siegmund had "adventures," whereas Chernow describes his affair with the ballerina Danilova (and Lola Hahn-Warburg's with Chaim Weizmann too). But the deep difference between the two books is in their philosophies. For Chernow, the assimilation and dispersal of the Warburgs represents a failure to enter the promised land; for Attali, the Warburgs were "uncommon seers, escaping, thanks to their centuries-old universality, from the general tragedy."

After Siegmund's death in 1982, S.G. Warburg outgrew its family roots. It has become vastly larger and more diversified (Siegmund always feared bigness for its own sake), its stock is publicly traded, and Siegmund's successor is a gentile outsider, Sir David Scholey. In England, the United States, and Germany, the distinctive Warburg contribution has been absorbed into the broader financial cultures. Institutions that the Warburgs had a hand in creating now are collective rather than individual, corporate rather than familial, of the mainstream rather than specifically Jewish. Chernow gives an essentially suspicious account of this gradual dilution of the Warburg "identity," since the arrival of the Jew known only as "Simon of Cassel" at Warburg in 1559; though he must concede that only the reawakening of archaic anti-Semitism could now give that identity back.

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The University of Virginia announces the 1994 competition for the Walker Cowen Memorial Prize, presented biennially to the author of a book-length manuscript dealing with scholarship in eighteenth-century studies in history, literature, philosophy, or the arts. The award of $3,000 and publication of the manuscript by the University Press of Virginia is given in memory of Walker Cowen, former director of the University Press of Virginia.

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The Reader Replies

Notes on the Poststructural Code

Postmodernism and poststructuralism have been de rigueur for aspirants to academic sexiness for some time now and have even begun to make inroads into the popular consciousness. For a humanist dinosaur such as myself, it has seemed best to try to ignore it in the most agreeable fashion possible until it goes the inevitable way of hula hoops and Olivia Newton-John. I make an honest effort to nod and smile knowingly when my Comp Lit friends describe Madonna as exemplifying "the Lacanian triad of having, being, and seeming." And as little as I may think of him as an artist, I am forced to admire the sheer chutzpah that allows Jeff Koon to exhibit (and *sell*) his work to admiring fans—one senses in him the kind of childlike joy in bamboozling his fellow human beings that would have warmed the cockles of Mark Twain's heart. However, the recent article by Bert O. States, "Notes on the Poststructural Code" (THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR, Winter 1994), reached such dizzying heights of self-congratulatory smugness that I find myself compelled, at the risk of showing my humanist colors, to respond with a few comments of my own.

At the beginning of his article Professor States displays some irritation with the "odd complaint about [poststructuralism's] impenetrability by intolerant outsiders"—presumably the same people he later refers to as "just in from Manitoba." Apparently, what even a bumpkin from Manitoba could recognize is the fact that poststructuralist writing is a "code," one that "succeeds in anesthetizing that part of the brain normally used to conjure images of what we are reading." No argument so far. I am also following right along when he notes that "what is precisely missing from coded language . . . is the need to be interesting," and that "*clarity* is precisely the wrong word to use in speaking of the code's mission." As his earlier reference to "outsiders" might suggest, the opacity of poststructural writing is not due to the complex nature of the truth it is designed to reveal (there *is* no truth!), but is rather an exclusionary end in itself. "The formulaic use of the terminology apparently fosters confidence, uniformity, and brotherhood among code users," he notes. "For this is not the discourse of communication or the discourse of rapprochement, of dialogue and negotiation, of speaking to the enemy, but a discourse of radical self-isolation."

I have never even *been* to Manitoba, but I nonetheless find myself wondering about the utility of a code that has no relationship to reality. Of course, the poststructuralists would vehemently deny the existence of any "real" world, arguing that such bourgeois concepts as "reality," "ideas," and "facts" are nothing more than creations of our own self-contained discourses. This is not the place to discuss the intricacies of epistemological and linguistic skepticism; I will merely note that in practice this form of radical skepticism is and always has been a difficult position to hold, involving as it does the paradox of the "Cretan Liar," who went about proclaiming that everything he said was a lie. The poststructuralists contemptuously reject the suggestion that their discourse should have meaning—that their terms should have any reference—while at the same time desiring that their "ideas" be taken as somehow valid descriptions of the state of discursive battle in which we all live. In other words, while contemptuously denying that what they say has any real meaning, poststructuralists very much expect to be taken seriously.

It is not entirely clear to me that they *should* be taken seriously. Presuming that Professor States is correct in claiming that the "principle of the synonym" (i.e., the principle that terms actually contain some reference) is "little more than a paranoiac hedge against boredom," we are forced to view poststructuralists as essentially an elite group of university-tenured "ornamental birds," performing an elaborate, meaningless dance for the benefit of other insiders and periodically collecting a paycheck. While this is, I suppose, good work if you can get it, I am not sure that in such a position I would share the degree of self-satisfaction displayed by Professor States. Indeed, I have difficulty waxing enthusiastic over any ideology that has as its raison d'être the sowing of exclusiveness and division. It has always seemed rather ironic to me that a

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movement professing to support the disenfranchised and downtrodden against their phallocentric, cultural elitist oppressors should itself be so inaccessible and elitist. If Professor States is correct (and I am afraid that he is) that much of the appeal of poststructuralism is due to the "*jouissance* simply to pronounce the name of Jacques Derrida, to release the liquid wind chime of Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe or Luce Irigaray . . . ," one cannot but conclude that this world of Francophile intellectual poseurs (excuse my French) is closed to those of us not blessed with euphonious surnames. (And where does this leave Mr. Bert O. States?)

I would not consider myself an "intolerant outsider," and do not believe that my criticism is born of ignorance. I've read Derrida and Lacan. I've read Barthes, I've even made it through some of Kristeva's turgid prose. I have to admit that—with the exception of Foucault's work—I would rather go to the dentist than read any of it again, but my aversion is at least *informed* aversion. I suppose that what I find so galling is the poststructuralists' conscious championing of style over substance. Perhaps I am a bit old-fashioned in believing that there *is* such a thing as substance—that there is more to life than MTV, name-dropping avant-garde intellectuals, and flavor-of-the-month postmodern artists—but it would seem to me that the existence of some sort of substance behind all the hype is the only thing that would make possible meaningful communication between human beings. This is not a purely academic consideration. While Professor States contemptuously turns up his nose at what he terms a "discourse of communication or the discourse of rapprochement, of dialogue and negotiation," it may very well be the case that it is precisely this sort of "speaking to the enemy" that our increasingly fragmented society urgently needs.

EDWARD SLINGERLAND
San Francisco, California

BERT O. STATE replies: I owe an apology to the people of Manitoba. I don't think they're bumpkins at all, and I'm sorry if I've given readers that impression. I chose Manitoba because it looked, in my atlas, like the kind of place that hadn't yet been contaminated by the blight of terminal indeterminacy that is taking so many of our trees here in the Groves. I also figured—can Mr. Slingerland have missed my attempt at irony?—that Manitoba is probably a place where there is still an abiding interest in communication, rapprochement, dialogue, and negotiation with the enemy (if any exist). Orwell would probably have like it in Manitoba.

But the main reason I chose Manitoba is that I love the sound of the word: Man-i-to-ba! It's like flamingo. It has a friendly sound, unlike stiff British Columbia or scratchy Saskatchewan (my first-draft choice). They probably have wonderful things there like Manitoba warblers, the Manitoba Gazette, and even bumper stickers like "Manitobamania: Catch it!" And there are towns in Manitoba with names like Cranberry Portage, Gypsumville, and Swan River. And if there were a postmodern codist named Manitoba (perish the thought), he or she would be quoted by the yard, everywhere. Imagine swirling your drink at a party and being able to say something like "As cultural praxis, Manitoba's discourse is positioned between Lentricchia and Deleuze." On the other hand, as Mr. Slingerland notes, it would be hard (soundbytewise) to imagine anyone swirling a drink and alluding to the Slingerland-States debate, especially with pâté in your mouth.

Anyway, by Manitobans I certainly wasn't referring to intolerant outsiders who complain about the code's impenetrability. The Manitobans I had in mind wouldn't be intolerant at all: they'd be mystified. At most they would ask why in God's name anyone would want to write like that; then they'd shrug their shoulders and go about their business. No, the intolerant outsiders are people like Slingerland and States.

As for responding to Mr. Slingerland, I can't think of much to argue about. I confess I am puzzled by his reference to my "self-satisfaction" with the code. Is it possible that he has read me *literally*? Otherwise, as far as I can see we're fellow travelers, dinosaur class. Perhaps the main difference between us is that I've stated things from the dizzying heights of self-congratulatory smugness, whereas he is content to sling along in selfless humility.

Sex in the Head

The mistakes in Professor Meyers's review of my biography of Gerald Brenan (THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR, Autumn 1993) are so glaring that a reader of both it and my book would suppose Meyers incapable of taking in a text. He allocates to Brenan an account clearly referenced to Orwell traveling in Spain (p. 143); talks of Brenan spending his life "mainly" in the Mediterranean when simple arithmetic would have shown him that over half of it (the formative half) was spent in Ireland and England; Meyers even describes Lytton Strachey's companion Dora Carrington as a nymphomaniac! Had he read page 162 of the book he would have learnt that Carrington disliked making love with men. Gertler wooed her passionately for three years—

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and was allowed to sleep with her once.

As the review proceeds, tangled illogicalities and contradictions begin to pile up. Meyers complains that the book "wallows in pedantic and trivial detail." He quotes: "on the 14, 15, 16, 17 and 18 July" Brenan had tea and talked to Gamel Woolsey. "But," writes Meyers in his next sentence, "he does not tell us what they actually talked about." If the details are so pedantic and trivial, why does Meyers want them added to? In fact, as he knows perfectly well, these dates were vital to Brenan. They were his first meetings with his future wife, and it was necessary to show with what intensity he pursued her. The significant substance of their exchanges—her affair with Llewelyn Powys and Gamel's writing—are given in the following two pages. Again, Meyers complains that a trip to Italy gives no idea what it was like to travel with Brenan, when if he'd read pp. 264–66 and 480–81, he'd have found this fully described.

Prose behavior of this sort alerts one to the fact that something is up. What is up is that Meyers was not remotely interested in reviewing the biography; he wished—for a perfectly explicable reason—to rubbish it. As a result in the "two important" misrepresentations he purports to discover, he first makes assumptions and second both distorts and conceals what I wrote in a manner not forgivable in a supposedly respectable scholar.

The first concerns Lynda Price's translations of the poems of St. John of the Cross for Brenan's biography. Meyers bluntly asserts that the "translations were surely a collaborative effort, more his work than hers." Really? On what evidence? He gives none, except that he visited them in 1972. It is clear from the word "surely" that this is merely Meyers's unsupported assumption.

The assumption is wrong. I stayed with Brenan in 1972, as I did regularly for many years. I well remember them both at work and Gerald grumbling that Lynda would only consult him about the odd word. But the situation is clear from his correspondence. He wrote to Frances Partridge (January 1971): "I am worried whether Lynda's translations will be good enough. But she refuses to let me help her. She is a stubborn girl. I keep my fingers crossed." To V. S. Pritchett (March/April 1973): "She did them [the translations] entirely alone." (VSP's letters to GB are at Austin, Texas, if Meyers is interested, for once, in checking.) I did not include these letters because it did not occur to me, after 33 years of close friendship with Gerald and 5 years writing his biography, that someone would presume to know more about these matters than I did. But Meyers could have discovered this from my book. On page 533 I describe Brenan's early doubts about her work. Meyers might have asked himself why, if they were collaborating and the work was more his than hers, he should have doubts.

Meyers goes blundering on. "[Brenan's] tin-eared biographer . . . absurdly calls 'her' translations superior to the dazzling versions by Roy Campbell." Whether tin-eared or not, the view was not mine (though I share it) but Gerald's. In that same letter to VSP he writes, "How good they [Lynda's translations] are. Far better than Roy Campbell's." Even this Meyers could have got from my book. Footnote to page 547: "It [Roy Campbell's verse] was, for example, in Gerald's view, often florid and rhetorical where St. John is delicate, elliptical and strange."

The second "important misrepresentation" concerns Gerald's time in an old people's home in 1984. This was a sad, delicate, and highly complex situation and, unless I give it in full, I think the best thing is to refer the interested reader to my treatment of it (pp. 589–595) when the travesty of Meyers's account will be obvious.

Meyers also seeks to gain verisimilitude by dragging himself in whenever possible. He writes as an intimate. In fact, in real terms, Meyers barely knew Gerald at all. Gerald kept none of his letters, none of Meyers's books are in his library, not one of Gerald's close friends or servants or acquaintances mentioned Meyers or remembered him. I wouldn't have known of his existence if Meyers hadn't written and told me about it himself—and at some length.

All writers of biographies are familiar with this—the little-known acquaintance trying to scrape in even if it is only as a footnote. Meyers duly got his footnote, and it is this that has infuriated him and explains his spleen.

A few years ago Meyers edited a book about D. H. Lawrence. In this he makes considerable play with his discovery that Brenan was "clearly influenced" by Lawrence. I was interested in this, and hopeful (I admire Lawrence), though all the evidence pointed in the opposite direction. To my astonishment I found that his only "evidence" is an occasional coincidence of view. You need more than this to furnish an essay. I pointed out in my footnote, with some asperity, that writers of the same period often reach similar conclusions without even reading each other, much less if showing "influence." But now, as he ends his review, Meyers comes up with more of the same stuff.

Had he bothered to study the evidence, the slack scholar would have found, as I say, that it points in completely the opposite direction. As early as 1923 Gerald was writing to Carrington expressing his intense dislike of Lawrence (GB to Carrington, June 21, 1923; also at Austin.) For many years Gerald modeled his style (Meyers lays great emphasis on style) on writers who had influenced him. But so far from using

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Lawrence as a model, he did his best to make sure he *didn't* write like him (GB to VSP, December 14, 1940, Austin). In a letter to Frances Partridge (June 3, 1963) he says he still finds Lawrence "repellent."

A writer can dislike another writer and still be influenced by him or her. But the real point is that this was a topic which fascinated Gerald. In his books, letters, and even more in his conversation, he loved discussing who had influenced him and why. In *A Life of One's Own* he does this with Shelley, Rimbaud, Richard Jeffries, and Nietzsche (who also repelled him). I can remember countless conversations about Proust and Svevo and Gibbon, just as these are discussed in his letters and books. I remember nothing about Lawrence, nor is there anything about him in his books; in the letters almost only dislike and criticism.

The books of Lawrence's which Meyers vaguely and hopefully cites—*Kangaroo* and Lawrence's *Apocalypse*—are not even in Gerald's library. It is quite possible he hadn't read them. In a letter to David Garnett (March 17, 1957), he says Lawrence "irritates me so much I can hardly read him."

Furious at being caught out in a stupid guess about someone he hardly knew and has never studied, Meyers wrote a piece for which even a hack reviewer, much less a supposedly reputable scholar, would have been heartily ashamed.

JONATHAN GATHORNE-HARDY
Binham, Norfolk, England

JEFFREY MEYERS replies: Gathorne-Hardy argues from a false assumption. He thinks that having known Gerald Brenan and studied his life and works for several years makes his account authoritative. In fact, he makes a number of errors and gets several crucial issues quite wrong. He remains obstinately ignorant and refuses to recognize his mistakes even when they are pointed out to him. His letter is as long-winded as his book.

His first paragraph, attempting to score a few feeble points, deliberately distorts what I wrote. Gathorne-Hardy states in his book that "Orwell described the same sort of journey," so it is reasonable to assume, as he implies, that Gerald once shared a train with sheep. I was clearly speaking of Gerald's adult life when I stated that it was mainly spent in the Mediterranean. I said Dora Carrington was "half nymph, half nymphomaniac." My source is Dora Carrington herself, quoted, with agreement, in Gerald's *Personal Record*, p. 172. Gathorne-Hardy not only fails to recognize the allusion but, in his eagerness to contradict me, also contradicts both Dora and Gerald.

Gathorne-Hardy thinks piling up boring facts makes a biography. It doesn't. He still doggedly insists that "on 14, 15, 16, 17 and 18 July he had Gamel to tea and talked into the evening" is an illuminating sentence. He fails to see that adding significant details of what they talked about would make it less pedantic and trivial. I said he did not describe what it was like to travel with Gerald on the trip to Venice. Referring to other passages about other trips does not answer the criticism. My aim was not to "rubbish" the book. I called it "thoroughly researched, knowledgeable about Spain, and written in a generally lively style."

My evidence for the collaborative translations is stated in the review. Lynda, who had been working in a souvenir shop in Toledo, "lacked a literary background and had a limited knowledge of Spanish." Her translations would never have been published if Gerald had not included them in his own book, *St. John of the Cross*. Gerald's doubts about her work were based on *her* part of the collaboration. He certainly would have gone over them very carefully, to satisfy his well-founded doubts, before sending his typescript to the publisher and when correcting proofs of the book. Gerald believed Lynda Price was a greater poet and translator than Roy Campbell because he was hopelessly in love with her. Gathorne-Hardy has no such excuse.

It is Gathorne-Hardy, not I, who drags himself into the book whenever possible (there are sixteen page references to himself in the index), introducing himself, his relatives, his ancestors—even his dreams. I claimed no more than having known Gerald when we both lived near Málaga in the early 1970s and having visited him in Pinner in June 1984. My account of that visit was based on firsthand observation and on conversations with Gerald. I don't see anything wrong with offering information to a prospective biographer. I am always grateful for such material.

I discussed D. H. Lawrence's influence on Gerald in the chapter on "Lawrence and Travel Writers" in my book on *The Legacy of D. H. Lawrence* (1987), pp. 104–107, and condensed the argument in the last paragraph of the review. I specifically (not vaguely) cited, as evidence, an intensely Lawrencean passage from Gerald's letters, pointed out that the hero of one of Gerald's novels had the same name as the hero of *Kangaroo* and quoted Gerald's deliberate echo of the conclusion of Lawrence's *Apocalypse*. Both David Garnett and his father Edward were close friends and admirers of Lawrence. Gathorne-Hardy missed all this and is still blind to what is perfectly obvious.

Gathorne-Hardy asserts that I have never studied Brenan. Quite wrong. If he were familiar with the bibliography, he would know that I have published three essays about Gerald. The words

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"stupid" and "hack" in his last paragraph reveal that my criticism has struck home. Gathorne-Hardy, supposedly a stickler for accuracy, never explains how Edmund Wilson's mother, who died in 1951, visited Gerald in 1954. Or how Wilson, who never went to Spain, turned up at Gerald's house.

Decline & Blumenthal

As a past president of the Geneseo Rotary club and a Paul Harris fellow, I am responding in an informal way to Aristides' "admitting to being, in effect, the intellectual equivalent of a Rotarian" in his essay "Decline & Blumenthal" (THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR, Winter 1994) by writing about some of my experiences as a member of Rotary.

During the past fifteen years or so, as my wife and I have vacationed in the summer, I have been privileged to attend Rotary club meetings in various places, including Zurich, Paris, Nice, Athens, Amman (Jordan), Larnaca (Cyprus), and Dubrovnik. I have also met with Rotarians in Lisbon, Cairo, Valetta (Malta), and Damascus (no Rotary Club in Syria, but the general manager of the Damascus Sheraton was a Rotarian from Austria), when I have been in those places at times when there were no meetings scheduled (if there were any).

It was at the Rotary club of Nice, France, at the Hotel Aston, some years ago, that I had a chance to chat briefly with the well-known mathematician Jean Dieudonné, a member of the famed N. Bourbaki mathematics-writing team, noted for its mathematics-intellectual achievements.

Each Rotary club has the option of admitting women as members. The Geneseo club, with fifty-two active members, has seventeen women members, which no doubt boosts the intellectual equivalence level of the club. European and Middle Eastern Rotary clubs, I think, seem less inclined to admit women members than do the U.S. clubs.

Each member of a Rotary club is assigned a classification in accordance with his or her business or profession. For example, my classification is: "Education-University." In the summer of 1990, at a meeting of the Larnaca (Cyprus) Rotary club, I asked if women were to be admitted to the Cyprus clubs; amidst a certain amount of laughter, I was told, jestingly, of course, that Cyprus Rotary has two classifications for women members: Miss Cyprus and Miss Universe.

Last summer (1993) at the Rotary club meeting at the Hotel Aston in Nice, I spoke (in French) about Geneseo having seventeen women members in the Rotary club. I then asked whether the Nice Rotary would have women members, and I received the rather boisterous, with laughter, reply from them: "Jamais!"

I think that it was reported that H. L. Mencken once said that: "The first Rotarian was the first man to call John the Baptist "Jack."

WILLIAM A. SMALL
Geneseo, New York

Bourgeois Virtue

Professor Donald McCloskey in the Spring 1994 AMERICAN SCHOLAR has done a significant favor to all readers, abetted by the editor, apparently having created a new word: *conjective.*

It appears to be a perfectly useful word, especially in the comparative context of the words *subjective* and *objective,* which leads you to believe that *conjective* makes sense. But a diligent search through the appropriate references is nonnutritive, for *conjective* cannot be found to pin down exactitude of meaning; unless, of course, I own and use very old dictionaries.

Our language is in constant flux, resulting from growth through coining of new words and manipulation of meaning of old words, which, no doubt, lexicographers will consider when judging *conjective* for possible inclusion in our vocabulary. It will be helpful, however, if Professor McCloskey defines the word for lexicographers, rather than have them speculate on its meaning.

I'm not opposed to the word. I'd just like to know better what he means by it, although I appreciate the visual unity of form in his use of this new word. It has alliterative rhythm and melody resulting from both its columnar and its linear placement on the page next to *objective* and *subjective.*

I also appreciate his essay on virtues, which confirms many interpretive differences with which I am contending in the creation of a new, national, children's educational television series.

FRED G. THORNE
Chico, California

DONALD MCCLOSKEY replies: *Conjective* is a coinage meaning, as Mr. Thorne discerns, "between objective and subjective, a *tertium quid*; socially negotiated as against existing in the subject's mind or in the mind of God." We seem to need something like it. *Objective* and *subjective* (though introduced to English from German in their modern meanings as recently as Coleridge) have a mighty grip on the modern mind. We fail to notice that what is known is neither, but rather *conjective.* The third term fits better the virtues of we bourgeois, who spend our days on the Rialto, walking, talking, and negotiating.

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From Natchez to Mobile . . .

In his discussion of Hoagy Carmichael's songs in "From Natchez to Mobile, From Memphis to St. Joe" (THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR, Spring 1994), William Zinsser describes the chorus of "Lazy River" as having a melody "as lazy as the river. Its first eight bars are full of curves and bends, and the next eight bars repeat the curving pattern without actually repeating the notes, just as different stretches of a river look alike without being alike."

This is nicely put, and one imagines that Carmichael would have liked it, but he would have to point out that it's not his music that Zinsser is writing about. As John Hasse points out in his notes to the Smithsonian Carmichael collection, the New Orleans clarinetist Sidney Arodin wrote the chorus of "Lazy River." In this particular case, Carmichael composed the verse and wrote the lyrics.

JEROME S. SHIPMAN
Potomac, Maryland

Dangerous Beauty

I would like to add a personal note to Terry Teachout's interesting review of Humphrey Carpenter's biography of Benjamin Britten, and the slightly nebulous discussion of Britten's penchant for boys. I am not about to make a "Donahue" disclosure, but my own youthful friendship with the composer is a matter of fact and not speculation.

It came about while I was a sixteen-year-old schoolboy at Wellington College, a private school in Britain, when in 1945 our art master, Kenneth Green, was commissioned to design the sets and costumes for the original production of *Peter Grimes*. Britten, often with Peter Pears, made frequent visits to the school.

I first met Ben when they realized that in the postwar period it was going to be impossible to buy the right textiles for the costumes. I was a regular user of the art school and a friend of Kenneth Green's. He and Ben asked if I, and one or two other boys, would be prepared to potato-print the desired patterns on plain cloth. It is an interesting footnote to operatic history that the original costumes for this masterpiece had to be produced in this primitive way. It was typical of Ben that having enlisted our help, he frequently visited us at work. And when he invited me to a rehearsal at Sadler's Wells Theatre, he stopped the orchestra in full flood, to welcome me and to explain what was going on.

During that year, Ben also became involved in our musical life. My house was rehearsing a "concerto for piano, trombone and percussion," composed by a senior boy, James Barnard, who later became Britten's amanuensis, for the interhouse music competition. Wellington was a musical school, particularly good at encouraging the unmusical–like me–to take part. I was enlisted to play the side drum in the concerto.

The day came when Ben dropped in to a rehearsal. At first he sat, listening carefully. Then, he asked if he might conduct a run-through. His seriousness was intense. At the end, he peered at the score. "I'm sorry. There's something missing in the middle section. I wonder if you could find me a length of drainpipe and a large pebble?" Three boys returned shortly with the required items. Ben took the pebble and played a few tentative notes. "Perfect," he said, and with a Mozartian facility, in fifteen minutes he scored the new part and taught one of the more musical boys to play his newly invented instrument. He was right. The singing note of the pipe gave a special quality to the middle section.

I could not read music, and my only way of ensuring my entrances and exits was to count the beat, which required considerable concentration. Ben knew nothing of this, but as we went through a final rehearsal, I noticed that he kept looking at me, and that his smile eventually developed into uncontrollable laughter. He laid down his baton and leant towards me over his music stand. "I hope you will forgive me," he said. "I have played with a great many musicians all over the world, but you pull the most extraordinary faces of any instrumentalist I have ever worked with." "Ben, I can't read music. I have to count." "Ah!" said Ben. "Then I can only say that I wish all the musicians that I conduct showed such obvious concentration."

Even in 1945, we schoolboys were extremely streetwise about homosexuality, and I am certain that we knew about the relationship between Britten and Pears. I do remember clearly that there was nothing predatory about Britten. Indeed, there was about him a certain primness. His success with young people was that he treated one as an absolute equal, not just in terms of years, but in his serious consideration of one's ideas and suggestions; and we never saw the prickly side. He was at his best with young people, especially making music with them. I have known few geniuses, but Benjamin Britten has always remained in my memory as the nicest brilliant man I have ever met.

JOHN LOWE
Prayssas, France

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Index to Volume 63

Pagination of the volume is divided as follows: Winter, 1–160; Spring 161–320; Summer, 321–480; Autumn, 481–640. Listed in *Readers's Guide*

All in the Family (BOOKS), *Paul Delany*, 626
American Dryad: Agnes de Mille (DANCE), *Daniel Mark Epstein*, 591
Anderson, Erland, **False Discoveries** (Poem), 258
ARCHITECTURE: **Frank Lloyd Wright, The Many Lives Of,** *Dan Pinck*, 267
Aristides, **Decline & Blumenthal** (LIFE AND LETTERS), 7; **Boy N the Hood** (LIFE AND LETTERS), 167; **"Here to Buy Mink"** (LIFE AND LETTERS), 327; **Narcissus Leaves the Pool** (LIFE AND LETTERS), 487
Arnstein, Walter L., **My Interview with Bertrand Russell** (HISTORY), 123
At Large (Poem), *Frederick Morgan*, 590
Auden at the Opera (BOOKS), *Alan Jacobs*, 287
Auspitz, Josiah Lee, **The Wasp Leaves the Bottle: Charles Sanders Peirce** (BOOKS), 602

Baida, Peter, **What's in It for the Talent** (BOOKS), 308
Barasch, Robert, **Psychotherapy Awry** (CONTROVERSY), 476
Barzun, Jacques, **Psychotherapy Awry** (CONTROVERSY), 476; **The Press and the Prose** (JOURNALISM), 569
Begley, Ann M., **Grande Dame** (BOOKS), 622
Bernstein, Michael André, **The *Schindler's List* Effect** (MOVIES), 429
Billy Blake's Trial, *Brian Doyle*, 557
BIOGRAPHY: **The Fabled Moe**, *Nicholas Dawidoff*, 433
BOOKS: 130, 287, 449, 602
Himself, *George V. Higgins*, 130, review of *The Rascal King: The Life and Times of James Michael Curley (1874–1958)* by Jack Beatty.
Cairene Treasures, *Jonathan M. Elukin*, 137, review of *In an Antique Land: An Infidel in Egypt* by Amitav Ghosh.
The Ties that Bind, *Charles H. Hamilton*, 140, review of *The Idea of Civil Society* by Adam B. Seligman.
Unreliable Narrator, *Susan Miron*, 142, review of *Diary. Volumes 1–3* by Witold Gombrowicz, edited by Jan Kott, translated by Lillian Vallee.
Two Cultures, *Manfred Wolf*, 145, review of *Days of Obligation: An Argument with My Mexican Father* by Richard Rodriguez.
Eleemosynary, *Theodore Pappas*, 148, review of *The Tragedy of American Compassion* by Marvin Olasky.
The Great Unread, *Andrew Wachtel*, 151, review of *Ivan Bunin, Russian Requiem, 1885–1920: A Portrait from Letters, Diaries, and Fiction* edited with an introduction and notes by Thomas Gaiton Marullo.
Auden at the Opera, *Alan Jacobs*, 287, review of *W. H. Auden and Chester Kallman: Libretti and Other Dramatic Writings by W. H. Auden, 1939–1973* edited by Edward Mendelson (The Complete Works of W. H. Auden, Volume 2).
The House Dandy, *Jacob A. Stein*, 295, review of *Disraeli: A Biography* by Stanley Weintraub.
Poy-tree, *William H. Pritchard*, 302, review of *American Poetry: The Nineteenth Century.* Volume 1*: Philip Freneau to Walt Whitman.* Volume 2: *Herman Melville to Trumbull Stickney, American Indian Poetry, Folk songs and Spirituals* edited by John Hollander.
Give Him Liberty, *Michael Levin*, 306, review of *Are There too Many Lawyers? And Other Vexatious Questions* by Joseph Fulda.
What's in It for the Talent, *Peter Baida*, 308, review of *The Cost of Talent: How Executives and Professionals are Paid and How It Affects America* by Derek Bok.
Dangerous Beauty, *Terry Teachout*, 312, review of *Benjamin Britten: A Biography* by Humphrey Carpenter.
Head Trades, *Paul Roazen*, 315, review of *The Correspondence of Sigmund Freud and Sándor Ferenczi.* Volume 1, *1908–1914* edited by Eva Brabant, Ernst Falzeder, and Patricia Giampieri-Deutsch, translated by Peter T. Hoffer, with an introduction by Andre Haynal.
The Law's Leaden Muse, *Richard A. Posner*, 449, review of *The Oxford Dictionary of American Legal Quotations* edited by Fred R. Shapiro.
The Sovereign Nietzsche, *William E. Johnston, Jr.*, 452, review of *Nietzsche and Modern Times: A Study of Bacon, Descartes, and Nietzsche* by Laurence Lampert.
Post-Modernique, *Stephen Miller*, 458, review of *Sexy Dressing* by Duncan Kennedy.
How Good Are We?, *Mary Mothersill*, 461, review of *The Moral Sense* by James Q. Wilson.
The Strange Demise, *Jeffrey Gedmin*, 470, review of

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ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In Europe's Name: Germany and the Divided Continent by Timothy Garton Ash
Up from the Cave, *William Petersen*, 474, review of *The Evolution Man, or How I Ate My Father* by Roy Lewis.
The Wasp Leaves the Bottle: Charles Sanders Peirce, *Josiah Lee Auspitz*, 602.
SOS for RLS, *J. C. Furnas*, 619, review of *Robert Louis Stevenson: A Biography* by Frank McLynn.
Grande Dame, *Ann M. Begley*, 622, review of *Marguerite Yourcenar: Inventing a Life* by Josyane Savigneau, translated by Joan E. Howard.
All in the Family, *Paul Delany*, 626, review of *The Warburgs: The Twentieth-Century Odyssey of a Remarkable Jewish Family* by Ron Chernow.
Bourgeois Virtue, *Donald McCloskey*, 177
Bowers, Neal, **A Loss for Words: Plagiarism and Silence**, 545
Boy N the Hood (LIFE AND LETTERS), *Aristides*, 167
Brull, H. Frank, **Psychotherapy Awry** (CONTROVERSY), 476
Bulldog and the Butterfly, The: The Friendship of Edmund Wilson and Vladimir Nabokov, *Jeffrey Meyers*, 379
Busch, Trent, **I. T. Davis** (Poem), 542

Cairene Treasures (BOOKS), *Jonathan M. Elukin*, 137
Cavafy (Poem), *Eugene Schlanger*, 402
Closest to Home (Poem), *Norbert Krapf*, 601
CONTROVERSY: **Psychotherapy Awry**, *Laura Kleinerman, Anthony S. Fiorino, Robert Barasch, H. Frank Brull, Gregory Ludwig, Jacques Barzun,* and *Paul R. McHugh*, 476
Copperheads (Poem), *E. M. Schorb*, 86
Cording, Robert, **Crossed Song** (Poem), 214
CRIME: **Murder as One of the Liberal Arts**, *James Hitchcock*, 277
Crossed Song (Poem), *Robert Cording*, 214
CULTURE: **The Tyranny of the Aesthetic**, *John P. Sisk*, 119
Cusac, Anne-Marie, **Marsh Hawk** (Poem), 129

Dailey, Peter, **Jimmy** (REAPPRAISAL), 102
DANCE: **American Dryad: Agnes de Mille**, *Daniel Mark Epstein*, 591
Dangerous Beauty (BOOKS), *Terry Teachout*, 312
Dankleff, Richard, **With the Sun Rising** (Poem), 192
Dawidoff, Nicholas, **The Fabled Moe** (BIOGRAPHY), 433
Day in April, A (Poem), *Barbara Van Noord*, 400
Decline and Blumenthal (LIFE AND LETTERS), *Aristides*, 7
Delany, Paul, **All in the Family** (BOOKS), 626
Der-Hovanessian, Diana, **Sexist Poem** (Poem), 110
Did the Russian Revolution Have to Happen?, *Richard Pipes*, 215
Doyle, Brian, **Billy Blake's Trial**, 557
Dr. Livingstone, He Presumed (EXPLORATION), *Dan Jacobson*, 96

Egemo, Constance, **Photograph, Fall of '41** (Poem), 117
Eleemosynary (BOOKS), *Theodore Pappas*, 148
Elukin, Jonathan M., **Cairene Treasures** (BOOKS), 137
Enright, Sean, **Heart and Soul** (Poem), 212
Epitaph (Poem), *Bruce Guernsey*, 582
Epstein, Daniel Mark, **American Dryad: Agnes de Mille** (DANCE), 591
EXPLORATION: **Dr. Livingstone, He Presumed**, *Dan Jacobson*, 96
Extended Sonnet (Poem), *Alicia Ostriker*, 420

Fabled Moe, The (BIOGRAPHY), *Nicholas Dawidoff*, 433
FACT FINDING: **No Gambling at the Casino Paganini**, *Hugh McGinnis Ferguson*, 89
False Discoveries (Poem), *Erland Anderson*, 258
Ferguson, Hugh McGinnis, **No Gambling at the Casino Paganini** (FACT FINDING), 89
Filkins, Peter, **Hidden Meadow** (Poem), 257
Fiorino, Anthony S., **Psychotherapy Awry** (CONTROVERSY), 476
Fox, Renée C., **"Les Roses, Mademoiselle": The Universe of Michel de Ghelderode**, 403
Frank Lloyd Wright, The Many Lives Of (ARCHITECTURE), *Dan Pinck*, 267
Freedman, Morris, **Remembering Clement Greenberg** (MEMOIR), 583
From Natchez to Mobile, From Memphis to St. Joe (POPULAR CULTURE), *William Zinsser*, 259
FROM THE ACADEMY: **Notes on the Poststructural Code**, *Bert O. States*, 111
Furnas, J. C., **SOS for RLS** (BOOKS), 619

Gedmin, Jeffrey, **The Strange Demise** (BOOKS), 470
George Eliot for Grown-Ups (REAPPRAISAL), *Gertrude Himmelfarb*, 577
Give Him Liberty (BOOKS), *Michael Levin*, 306
Glorifier, The: Florenz Ziegfeld and the Creation of the American Showgirl (SHOW BUSINESS), *Michael Lasser*, 441
Goodstein, David, **Pariah Science: Whatever Happened to Cold Fusion?**, 527
Granddaughter and Ancestors (Poem), *Margaret Kay*, 58
Grande Dame (BOOKS), *Ann M. Begley*, 622
Great Unread, The (BOOKS), *Andrew Wachtel*, 151
Guernsey, Bruce, **Epitaph** (Poem), 582

Hamilton, Charles H., **The Ties That Bind** (BOOKS), 140
Head Trades (BOOKS), *Paul Roazen*, 315

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Heart and Soul (Poem), *Sean Enright*, 212
Heat Lightning (Poem), *Robert Morgan*, 76
"Here to Buy Mink" (LIFE AND LETTERS), *Aristides*, 327
Hidden Meadow (Poem), *Peter Filkins*, 257
Higgins, George V., **Himself** (BOOKS), 130
Himmelfarb, Gertrude, **George Eliot for Grown-Ups** (REAPPRAISAL), 577
Himself (BOOKS), *George V. Higgins*, 130
HISTORY: **My Interview with Bertrand Russell**, *Walter L. Arnstein*, 123
Hitchcock, James, **Murder as One of the Liberal Arts** (CRIME), 277
House Dandy, The (BOOKS), *Jacob A. Stein*, 295
How Good Are We? (BOOKS), *Mary Mothersill*, 461
How Not to Make a Stradivarius, *Thomas Levenson*, 351

"I call it back . . . " (Poem), *Frederick Morgan*, 286
Infinite, The (Poem), *Giacomo Leopardi* (English version by John Frederick Nims), 448
I. T. Davis (Poem) *Trent Busch*, 542

Jacobs, Alan, **Auden at the Opera** (BOOKS), 287
Jacobson, Dan, **Dr. Livingstone, He Presumed** (EXPLORATION), 96
Jimmy (REAPPRAISAL) *Peter Dailey*, 102
Johnston, Jr., William E., **The Sovereign Nietzsche** (BOOKS), 452
JOURNALISM: **The Press and the Prose**, *Jacques Barzun*, 569

Kay, Margaret, **Granddaughter and Ancestors** (Poem), 58
Kleinerman, Laura, **Psychotherapy Awry** (CONTROVERSY), 476
Krapf, Norbert, **Meditation in the Israelite Cemetery, Würzburg** (Poem), 60; **Closest to Home** (Poem), 601

Lasser, Michael, **The Glorifier: Florenz Ziegfeld and the Creation of the American Showgirl** (SHOW BUSINESS), 441
Latin Fanatic: A Profile of Father Reginald Foster, *Alexander Stille*, 497
Law's Leaden Muse, The (BOOKS), *Richard A. Posner*, 449
Leopardi, Giacomo, **The Infinite** (Poem) (English version by John Frederick Nims), 448
Leopold Labedz, *Edward Shils*, 239
"Les Roses, Mademoiselle": The Universe of Michel de Ghelderode, *Renée C. Fox*, 403
LETTER FROM FRANCE: **Nationalism and the Politics of Resentment**, *Eugen Weber*, 421
Levenson, Thomas, **How Not to Make a Stradivarius**, 351
Levin, Michael, **Give Him Liberty** (BOOKS), 306
LIFE AND LETTERS: **Decline & Blumenthal**, *Aristides*, 7; **Boy N the Hood**, *Aristides*, 167; **"Here to Buy Mink,"** *Aristides*, 327; **Narcissus Leaves the Pool**, *Aristides*, 487
Lily of the Valley (Poem), *Christine Whittemore*, 556
Longest Night, The: Broadcasting's First Invasion, *John McDonough*, 193
Loss for Words, A.: Plagiarism and Silence, *Neal Bowers*, 545
Ludwig, Gregory, **Psycotherapy Awry** (CONTROVERSY), 476

McCloskey, Donald, **Bourgeois Virtue**, 177
McCraw, Thomas K., **The Strategic Vision of Alexander Hamilton**, 31
McDonough, John, **The Longest Night: Broadcasting's First Invasion**, 193
McHugh, Paul R., **Psychotherapy Awry**, 17; **Psychotherapy Awry** (CONTROVERSY), 476
Marsh Hawk (Poem), *Anne-Marie Cusac*, 129
MARY ELINORE SMITH POETRY PRIZE, THE: **Wet Stones**, *Timothy E. Thatcher*, 349
Meanwhile, Back on the Ward . . ., *Jay Neugeboren*, 337
Meditation in the Israelite Cemetery, Würzburg (Poem), *Norbert Krapf*, 60
MEMOIR: **Remembering Clement Greenberg**, *Morris Freedman*, 583
Meyers, Jeffrey, **The Bulldog and the Butterfly: The Friendship of Edmund Wilson and Vladimir Nabokov**, 379
Miller, Philip, **Vick's Salve** (Poem), 440
Miller, Stephen, **Post-Modernique** (BOOKS), 458
Miron, Susan, **Unreliable Narrator** (BOOKS), 142
Morgan, Frederick, **"I call it back . . . "** (Poem), 286; **At Large** (Poem), 590
Morgan, Robert, **Heat Lightning** (Poem), 76
Mothersill, Mary, **How Good Are We?** (BOOKS), 461
MOVIES: **The *Schindler's List* Effect**, *Michael André Bernstein*, 429
Murder as One of the Liberal Arts (CRIME), *James Hitchcock*, 277
My Interview with Bertrand Russell (HISTORY), *Walter L. Arnstein*, 123

Narcissus Leaves the Pool (LIFE AND LETTERS), *Aristides*, 487
Nationalism and the Politics of Resentment (LETTER FROM FRANCE), *Eugen Weber*, 421
Neugeboren, Jay, **Meanwhile, Back on the Ward . . .** 337
Nims, John Frederick, English version of **The Infinite** (Poem) by Giacomo Leopardi, 448
No Gambling at the Casaino Paganini (FACT FINDING), *Hugh McGinnis Ferguson*, 89
Nobel Prize for Literature, The, *Renee Winegarten*, 63
Notes on the Poststructural Code (FROM THE ACADEMY), *Bert O. States*, 111

Ostriker, Alicia, **Extended Sonnet** (Poem), 420

Pappas, Theodore, **Eleemosynary** (BOOKS), 148
Pariah Science: Whatever Happened to Cold Fusion?, *David Goodstein*, 527
Petersen, William, **Up from the Cave** (BOOKS), 474

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Photograph, Fall of '41 (Poem), *Constance Egemo*, 117
Pinck, Dan, **Frank Lloyd Wright, The Many Lives Of** (ARCHITECTURE), 267
Pipes, Richard, **Did the Russian Revolution Have to Happen?**, 215
POPULAR CULTURE: **From Natchez to Mobile, From Memphis to St. Joe**, *William Zinsser*, 259
Posner, Richard A., **The Law's Leaden Muse** (BOOKS), 449
Post-Modernique (BOOKS), *Stephen Miller*, 458
Poy-tree (BOOKS), *William H. Pritchard*, 302
Press and the Prose, The (JOURNALISM), *Jacques Barzun*, 569
Pritchard, William H., **Poy-tree** (BOOKS), 302
Psychotherapy Awry, *Paul R. McHugh*, 17
Psychotherapy Awry (CONTROVERSY), *Laura Kleinerman, Anthony S. Fiorino, Robert Barasch, H. Frank Brull, Gregory Ludwig, Jacques Barzun*, and *Paul R. McHugh*, 476

READER REPLIES, THE: 155, 319, 631
REAPPRAISAL: **Jimmy**, *Peter Dailey*, 102; **George Eliot for Grown-Ups**, *Gertrude Himmelfarb*, 577
Remembering Clement Greenberg (MEMOIR), *Morris Freedman*, 583
Roazen, Paul, **Head Trades** (BOOKS), 315

***Schindler's List* Effect, The** (MOVIES), *Michael André Bernstein*, 429
Schlanger, Eugene, **Cavafy** (Poem), 402
Schorb, E. M., **Copperheads** (Poem), 86
Sexist Poem (Poem), *Diana Der-Hovanessian*, 110
Shils, Edward, **Leopold Labedz**, 239
SHOW BUSINESS: **The Glorifier, Florenz Ziegfeld and the Creation of the American Showgirl**, *Michael Lasser*, 441
Sisk, John P., **The Tyranny of the Aesthetic** (CULTURE), 119
Slap Shot (Poem), *Matthew J. Spireng*, 544
SOS for RLS (BOOKS), *J. C. Furnas*, 619
Sovereign Nietzsche, The (BOOKS), *William E. Johnston, Jr.*, 452
Spireng, Matthew J., **Slap Shot** (Poem), 544
States, Bert O., **Notes on the Poststructural Code** (FROM THE ACADEMY), 111
Stein, Jacob A., **The House Dandy** (BOOKS), 295
Stille, Alexander, **Latin Fanatic: A Profile of Father Reginald Foster**, 497
Strange Demise, The (BOOKS), *Jeffrey Gedmin*, 470
Strategic Vision of Alexander Hamilton, The, *Thomas K. McCraw*, 31

Teachout, Terry, **Dangerous Beauty** (BOOKS), 312
Thatcher, Timothy E., **Wet Stones** (THE MARY ELINORE SMITH POETRY PRIZE), 349
Ties that Bind, The (BOOKS), *Charles H. Hamilton*, 140
Toynton, Evelyn, **Uncle Hans in Exile**, 77
Two Cultures (BOOKS), *Manfred Wolf*, 145
Tyranny of the Aesthetic, The (CULTURE), *John P. Sisk*, 119

Uncle Hans in Exile, *Evelyn Toynton*, 77
Unreliable Narrator (BOOKS), *Susan Miron*, 142
Up from the Cave (BOOKS), *William Petersen*, 474

Van Noord, Barbara, **A Day in April** (Poem), 400
Vick's Salve (Poem), *Philip Miller*, 440

Wachtel, Andrew, **The Great Unread** (BOOKS), 151
Wasp Leaves the Bottle, The: Charles Sanders Peirce (BOOKS), *Josiah Lee Auspitz*, 602
Weber, Eugen, **Nationalism and the Politics of Resentment** (LETTER FROM FRANCE), 421
Wet Stones (THE MARY ELINORE SMITH POETRY PRIZE), *Timothy E. Thatcher*, 349
What's in It for the Talent (BOOKS), *Peter Baida*, 308
Whittemore, Christine, **Lily of the Valley** (Poem), 556
Winegarten, Renee, **The Nobel Prize for Literature**, 63
With the Sun Rising (Poem), *Richard Dankleff*, 192
Wolf, Manfred, **Two Cultures** (BOOKS), 145

Zinsser, William, **From Natchez to Mobile, From Memphis to St. Joe** (POPULAR CULTURE), 259

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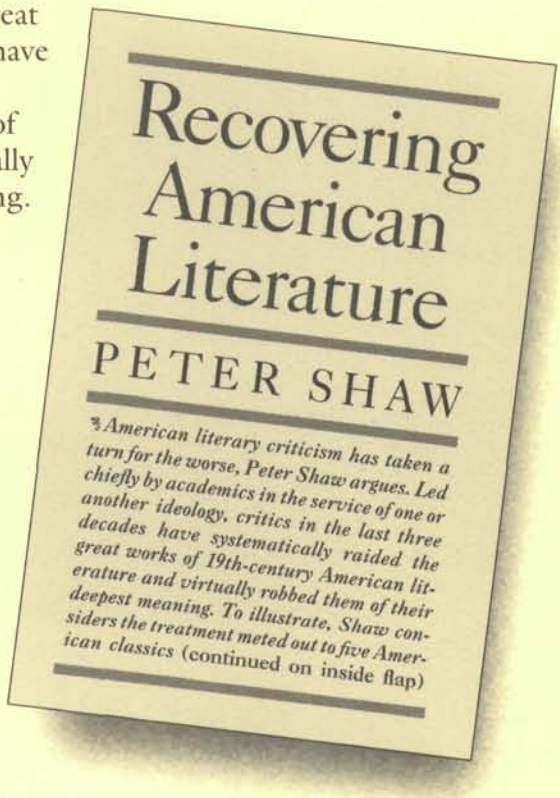

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